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# THE ROMANCE OF A MONK

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## **THE ROMANCE OF A MONK**

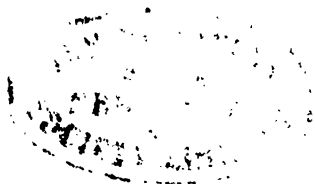


# THE ROMANCE OF A MONK

By ALIX KING

AUTHOR OF

"THE ROMANCE OF A NUN"

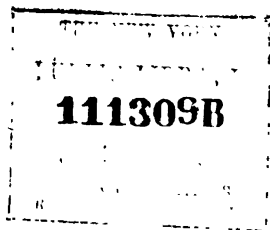


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## PART I

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## CHAPTER I

"ANYTHING but a cinematograph! I hate cinematographs."

"Hate them? My dear Madge, a month ago——"

"Miss Ockleston has been true to cinematographs for a month? Isn't that rather a record?"

The speakers were seated at one of the numerous small tables outside the Café Arango in Rome. A collection of empty cups and ice-plates hinted that their recent occupation had not been arduous, and two hours remaining to be killed before dinner-time, suggestions were being proffered as to a satisfactory method of assassination.

"Why not stay here? I'm quite happy," said a typically English-looking youth, lighting another cigarette. "What do you say, Capitano?"

"I also am happy—*felicissimo!*" The

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last word was addressed, not to Tom Rawling, but to the Captain's *vis-à-vis*. "I should be content to stay here for days—weeks—centuries."

"Well, I can't stay here another moment. So let us go somewhere—anywhere—except to a cinematograph."

As she spoke, Madge Ockleston rose—the signal for a perceptible tilting of chairs and straining of necks among the people—the men especially—in her vicinity.

"What a brazen girl! See how those horrid men are staring at her, and she takes it quite as a matter of course!" exclaimed an Englishwoman at a neighbouring table.

"A 'front-rower' like that," said her son, "must be so jolly well used to being stared at, no wonder she takes it as a matter of course. Talk of Italian beauties——!"

"It's as good as following royalty," laughed Tom Rawling, chairs and tables being moved aside with an eagerness perilous to their occupants, in order to make a passage for "La bella Inglese"; and once clear of the Café the question arose—cinematographs being barred—should it be a



stroll down the Corso or a drive to the Pincio?

"A quarter to six! Too late for the Pincio," said Captain Tiberi, looking at his watch. "*Andiamo!* We are blocking the way."

"Must we really go into that crowd? I hate being jostled," said Madge Ockleston. "And by such dreadful people!"

At that moment one of the "dreadful people"—one of the *most* dreadful, according to the Captain—elbowed her way to where the speaker stood.

"Madge!" she exclaimed, "how delightful! Where *did* you spring from? And what are you doing, you, of all people, here—alone?"

"*Paziénza!*" The word that is ever on an Italian's lips flew to the Captain's. Not that he was surprised at the evident delight with which Madge greeted the extraordinary female in the Alpine hat and the square-toed boots. Was she not English, and were not all English mad? But something told him that this meeting meant good-bye to his carefully planned *tête-à-tête*.

He was right. The lady in the Alpine

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hat having been introduced as "Miss Weatherdon, a friend I haven't seen for ten years," the party, *per forza*, began to move with the crowd, and Madge paired off with her friend.

"Ten years! Can it really be ten years? You don't look a day older! And, Madge," her tone one of mingled surprise and admiration, "how tremendously good-looking you have grown!"

Madge took the compliment with the same matter-of-course air with which she had taken the attention she had attracted at the Café. "You always said I had 'points,' you know."

"Points, yes, but—— Really, these Italians!—did you ever see anything like them?"—a man pausing in front of Madge and holding up his eyeglass as he murmured, "*Simpatica!*" "They want horsewhipping, the whole lot of them! By the way," the man having met her indignant stare with a grin and passed on, "you're not married, are you?"

"*Married!*"

"You needn't be so contemptuous. People do marry. As the man in *The Mikado*

said, 'I've known it done.' But"—laughing a breezy baritone laugh—"I remember you always had 'views' on the 'state'! You must tell me, when we've time for a talk, how many people have tried to make you change them. At present I must say good-bye. I'm going in there."

"Into San Luino?"

Jess's baritone laugh again rang out. "You needn't be alarmed, I'm not a convert. I can't afford to take Italian lessons, so I take sermons. If only one could take them without taking——" The last word being whispered, it must be left to the imagination. That it was nothing pleasant was suggested by Madge's—

"Horrid, isn't it? I had to give up going to Festas for the same reason. I love the lights and the flowers and the incense, and I adore the Cardinals, but"—a little shudder—"one can pay too dearly for such delights."

"Why, of course, this is Ash Wednesday," exclaimed Clarice Rawling, on hearing whither Miss Weatherdon was bound. "And I forgot all about it, and ate two ices and I'd hate to say how many cakes! Don't



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you think, as a penance, we might all go to the sermon? I heard some people in the tram this morning talking about the preacher. They say he's a monk and *molto bravo*."

"Yes, do let us go. I love monks—when they are clean," said Madge. "Come, Capitano! You are a Catholic, and will be able to explain things, and tell us what to do and what not to do."

"I'll begin by telling you not to go in there, unless you want to be asphyxiated. These services are only intended for the *popoli bassi*."

"So are cinematographs. Yet"—smiling—"distinguished people sometimes patronise them. Come; I'll pass these round," holding up a bunch of Parma violets, a gift of the Captain's—"should the atmosphere prove too suggestive of the *popoli bassi*."

With a gallant "My pleasure is ever the pleasure of the Signorina" and a *sotto voce* "*Paziénza!*" the Captain conducted his party across the road—no easy matter, the Corso at this house being almost impassable owing to the stream of carriages coming from the Pincio—up the steps leading to

San Luino, and held aside the heavy leather curtain, taking care that no harm should accrue to Madge's "cartwheel" hat. The church was in semi-darkness—the only light that yielded by half a dozen candles on a side altar. In front of this altar knelt a priest and two acolytes mumbling something to which the crowd in the body of the church responded, their hurried manner suggestive of anxiety for the ceremony to come to an end, and for something more entertaining to begin.

"They're saying the Rosary," whispered the Captain to Madge. "Wait here, and I'll bring you chairs."

"This will mean a harvest," sighed Jess, glancing at the crowd of dingy old men and women of which the congregation almost exclusively consisted. "Isn't it astonishing that one never sees a well-dressed, clean-looking person at these functions, except an occasional *forestiero*?"

"Poor dears! they can't afford cinematographs, so they affect sermons; but why, oh why, don't they leave their umbrellas at home?" laughed Madge, noticing that each of her neighbours grasped a huge green or

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brown umbrella in one hand and a rosary in the other. "Look at that poor old thing in the corner! She evidently arrived too late to get into the free seats. Surely she won't stand during the sermon?"

"Yes, she will," said Jess, "and during the Benediction that follows; and go away more pleased with herself than the people who have paid two *soldi* for their seats."

"Your *frate* must be *bravissimo*, judging from the fight for chairs," said the Captain, putting the three he had secured as near the pulpit and as far from aggressively unpleasant-looking neighbours as possible; and having placed the one given him by Tom as near Madge's as he dared, he mopped his forehead.

"What strange and wonderful ideas English people have of amusing themselves!" he thought, and, leaning over Madge's shoulder, he asked—

"You are enjoying yourself?"

"Very much—and you?"

"I am near you!"

Madge looked annoyed. The Captain's pretty speeches always annoyed her—when

she could not see his cloak. The cloak—the exact shade of blue she “adored”—covered a multitude of indiscretions. Madge’s admirers never had the sense to understand that, where she was concerned, the only unpardonable sin was to be too fond.

A great scraping of chairs telling that the Rosary was over, Madge turned to where the old peasant woman was standing.

“Poor old thing! see how the people have crushed her up against that pillar—she won’t even see the preacher,” she whispered to Jess. “Do you think I dare ask the Captain to get her a chair?”

“Rather a test of friendship,” laughed Jess. “You might try.”

Madge did try, and the Captain’s friendship stood the test. With his private thoughts, as he again ran the gauntlet of curious eyes—a captain at a Lenten sermon being sufficiently of a *rara avis* to excuse curiosity—we have nothing to do. Suffice it to say he felt ashamed of them as he heard Madge’s smiling “*Mille grazie. Lei e troppo gentile.*”

“They couldn’t be more excited if they

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were in a theatre, waiting for the curtain to go up," thought Madge, noting the awed hush—broken by an occasional "Here he is!"—with which the *frate's* arrival was expected.

"*Coraggio!* If he is fat, or if he's unshaven, we won't stay," she whispered over her shoulder to the Captain; and when she looked back, the *frate* was kneeling in the pulpit, his face buried in his hands. A moment later he rose, and with a low and almost inaudible "Signori," he began his sermon.

"He's not fat, and he's not unshaven. . . . *Paziénza!*" thought the Captain, resigning himself to an hour's unmitigated boredom.

"Pure Tuscan accent—I am so glad I came!" murmured Jess to herself, settling herself for an hour's free tuition; while Clarice and Tom gave their attention alternately to studying their neighbours and struggling with an overpowering inclination to go to sleep.

During the first part of the sermon Madge sat very quiet, her eyes fixed upon the preacher. Later she began to grow restless.

She put up her veil. She fanned herself. She played with her violets. She whispered something to the Captain which made him smile. But her efforts were useless. Neither by her attention nor by her inattention could she force the *frate* so much as to glance in her direction. That a man—any man, even a barefooted friar—should stand facing her for nearly an hour and remain unconscious of her presence, was in itself such a novelty that it interested while it piqued her.

"A hopeless fanatic! . . . Seeing visions, I suppose. . . . He evidently doesn't see *us*," she said to herself, with an impatient little shrug of her shoulders. Be, however, as contemptuous as she might, try as she would, she could not help wondering what would happen *should* the dreamy, far-off eyes meet hers. Would she see in them the look she had never yet failed to see in a man's eyes—the look to which she had grown so accustomed as to take it as a matter of course? Or would those vision-seeing other-worldly eyes recognise no attraction, nothing but a curse, in a merely carnal beauty such as hers?

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At a quarter to seven the *frate* sat down and began to read the announcements for the coming week.

"There's an interval of five minutes. Have you had enough of it?" asked the Captain, and he was astonished by the impatience in Madge's "Quite enough! Let us go!"

"What a rummy fish! Looks half daft. Doesn't eat enough, or takes too much discipline," exclaimed Tom Rawling, as the party made their way out into the cool night air.

"Did you ever see such a beautiful profile? He reminds me of the 'Narcisse' in the Naples Museum, and I rather like that detached expression," sighed Clarice. "What do you think of him, Madge?"

"He looks clean, and he seems sincere," replied Madge, stifling a not very natural yawn.

"Miss Ockleston is annoyed because he 'didn't notice her hat,'" laughed the Captain. "I was watching him, and I don't believe he even *saw* her—or her hat."

"He certainly couldn't have seen me

without seeing my hat," said Madge, with a perfectly natural laugh. Then, turning to Jess—"Was the accent satisfactory?"

"Quite. Pure Tuscan! I shall go to hear him every night."

"So shall I," said Madge.



## CHAPTER II

"SHE means mischief! I've seen that expression before, and it always meant mischief. I wonder what she does mean!" Jess's face was thoughtful as—having left Madge and her friends buying *marrons glacés* at a shop in the Corso—she hurried home to dress before dining with Madge at the latter's flat in Via Condotti.

This meeting with her old school-friend was quite an event in her usually uneventful life. Of the three or four dozen girls whose acquaintance she had made during a three years' residence as assistant teacher in a London school, Madge Ockleston had been the only one towards whom she had felt the slightest attraction or in whose future she had taken any interest. "Her frivolity is superficial—when it is not assumed. She has more in her than in all your B.A.'s put together," she had always remarked in reply

to the headmistress's complaints apropos of Madge's frivolity and inapplication. "Not that degrees are as essential to her as to some of the pupils; with her advantages she is sure to marry," Miss Palethorpe had been wont to add; and here again Jess had dared to differ. "I'm not so sure that she will marry," she would say, mindful of confidences exchanged between herself and Madge on the subject of matrimony; "but if she marries, I'm afraid it will be the wrong man. She is just the sort of girl to make a fiasco of matrimony."

"She hasn't made it *yet*. Perhaps I was wrong," she now thought, turning down the rather sordid-looking road leading to her pension; and as she mounted the marble steps which did their best to retrieve the unattractive approach she tried to remember what Madge had been like in those almost-forgotten days. Very tall, very thin, with a skin that looked provokingly cool in the hottest weather, and a mass of black hair with a "kink" in it. Yes, there had been "points," certainly—especially the kink, of which she remembered having been absurdly envious; but who could have imagined

—these points admitted at their full value—that the Madge of those days would ever develop into the Madge of to-day? Yet in some ways the two were strangely alike. Madge the schoolgirl—with no particular beauty, and remarkable only for being invariably plucked in the examinations and for having fewer good-conduct marks than any of the other pupils—had never failed to excite curiosity on the rare occasions when the outside world was admitted into Miss Palethorpe's school.

“Who is the tall, thin girl with the plaits wound round her head?” Jess had often heard parents inquire of their daughters; and the reply, “She is the daughter of a Captain Ockleston who was killed in South Africa,” was invariably received with a disappointed “Oh, she looks as though she might be somebody.” Now, more than in the old days, Madge looked as though “she might be somebody”; and perhaps it was to this air of distinction—a quality as inexplicable as it is rare—rather than to her actual beauty, that she owed the attention she never failed to attract. The smile, too, with which she had expressed her intention

to attend the *frate's* sermons was the identical smile with which Madge the schoolgirl had invariably heralded her most outrageous escapades.

"I must find out what mischief she is up to," thought Jess, letting herself in with the latchkey which for once she had not forgotten. "I can't have her playing tricks with my *frate*. If she wants new experiences, she must find them outside San Luino. That is *my* preserve."

### CHAPTER III

"YOU didn't expect her to be dressed *à la suburbia*—in streamers and a frilled apron? What is the use of having Italian servants unless they are dressed like Italians?"

"I don't know what I expected. And she's most picturesque. But she's rather a shock—at first," said Jess, following Madge into a room more typically Italian than Annunciatina's dress.

"I'm so glad you like it!" exclaimed Madge, in reply to her friend's raptures. "I was happy for a whole month while I was furnishing—after all, furnishing is the only hobby that never palls—and for almost a month afterwards; but now——" stretching out a slender foot to the blaze of the wood fire. "By the way, you don't happen to know of a desirable tenant, do you?"

Jess's eyes strayed from the exquisitely carved Florentine furniture lit up by pend-

ent *Strozzi* lamps to the dim *arazzi*-hung walls, and from them to the parquet floor with its oases of soft dark rugs.

"You Goth! You would let it?"

"Certainly—if I can find a suitable tenant. Italians, they say, never pay their rent."

Jess hesitated before laying her Alpine hat and golf cape on the filmy *Sorrento* quilt, and she wondered if Captain Tiberi were responsible for the mass of almond blossom and roses which stood in a tall bronze jar on the dressing-table.

"You should come to my den in Via della Croce, if you want to appreciate your flesh-pots," she said.

Madge laughed. "You can't teach me anything about pension bedrooms! . . . Yes, coming," in reply to a brusque "*Tavola!*" from Annunciatina. "An inch of carpet—no dressing-table, no glass in the wardrobe, no wall decorations except interesting information as to the cost of 'meals served in bedroom' and 'lights.' It was principally that I might breakfast in bed every morning and indulge in unlimited 'lights' without knowing the cost *per diem*, that induced me to take a flat."

"And to think," said Jess, following Madge into the adjoining room, "that you will let Mr. Anybody or Miss Nobody enjoy all this for—how much a week?"

"A hundred *lire*, plate and glass included. Hardly enough to pay my cab fares to the antiquity shops I haunted before I found these," replied Madge, gazing fondly at the antique silver spoons and forks. "And the sweetest little Neapolitan embroidered this. . . . The Medici arms—balls, not apples," Jess asking why her corner of the tablecloth was covered with apples. "The Barberini are here," pointing to a swarm of bees on another corner, "and the Strozzi and Tornabuoni are round the other side. I hope Mrs. Nobody will not be too lazy to arrange her own flowers. Imagine the man sending me a thing like that!" "That" was a gilt basket in the centre of the table, filled with roses—"of yesterday." "The Capitano? My dear Jess, it's evident you've only been a month in Italy. An Italian's admiration never takes a more expensive form than a bunch of violets; but, poor things, one can't wonder—they get such wretched pay; the officers, I mean. I have an arrangement

with a market-gardener to supply me with plants and flowers. I must introduce you to him. He's the most awful-looking tramp. Clarice met him on the stairs the other day and nearly went down again, she was so frightened, until I appeared and explained that he was my head gardener. The next day she asked me who was the 'sweet little beggar boy' she had seen coming out of the flat. That was my under gardener, Gigi, whose duty it is to change the water and plants. If Gigi"—turning to Annunziata—"ever brings a thing like this again, you must send it back. Will you remember?"

Annunziata not only pledged herself to remember, but for the following five minutes she discoursed on the eccentricities of market-gardeners in general and of this one in particular, especially when "*forestieri*" were being dealt with.

"She *will* join in the conversation," said Madge, when, the discourse ended—but not a moment before—the discourser disappeared with the soup-plates. "At first I used to let her talk when we were alone, and pull her up with an indignant '*Basta!*' when people were here; but it was useless. Talk



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she will, and talk she does; and after all, if an Italian works twice as hard as an English servant for half the pay, one must shut one's eyes to these little national peculiarities."

"They're certainly more decorative than our servants," said Jess, dividing her attention between her *cotelletta alla Milanese* and Annunciatina, who in her white chemi-sette, black velvet corsets, and red skirt, stood behind Madge's chair, her black eyes fixed on Madge's friend with an intentness not altogether suggestive of admiration. "*Propria una pazzarèlla*," she had confided to the cook, after opening the door to the Signorina Inglese. "Short hair, a man's hat and cloak! And boots—*Madonna mia!*—what boots!"

"This particular one is more decorative than decorous, I'm afraid," said Madge. "After dinner I'll tell you her story. It's one of the funniest things I ever heard. Give the Signorina some more tomato sauce, Annunciatina. I always notice, when there is tomato sauce, you don't pass it round a second time, for fear there should be none left for you."

*"La Signorina scherza!"*

"No, I don't joke. Louise told me, last time we had it, she found you finishing it in the passage."

"*Louise!* you'd believe what Louise says?" and Annunciatina's black eyes snapped in a way that boded a bad quarter of an hour for Louise.

"Quarrel?" said Madge, in reply to a suggestion from Jess. "They half kill each other two or three times a week. I give one of them—the less injured—notice, and an hour later the other comes and sobs, and implores me not to send away the '*poverina*,' and waxes so eloquent over the *poverina's* virtues that it ends in my appeasing the culprit for ever having contemplated parting with such a treasure."

"Annunciatina's story was very interesting, but I want to hear yours."

Dinner was over, and the friends were having their coffee before the wood fire in the *salotto*. On Madge's knee lay what looked like a shaved white rat, but which, she had just explained, was "forty lire worth of dog," which she had bought the

previous day from a man in the Corso because "it looked so miserable, and the man looked such a brute."

"My story? We have no story, and not very much hair, have we, Gigi?" she said, pulling a fold of her gown over the little shivering hind-quarters. "Isn't it a shame to shave the poor little wretches?"

But Jess was not to be put off. "Come," she said, "I want to hear all that has happened during the past ten years—all from the very beginning."

"Rather a large order—especially after two helps of chestnut cream. Is there anything, Gigi, more brain-enervating than chestnut cream? If there is——"

"Is there anything," laughed Jess, "more aggravating than dog-talk, when one is dying of curiosity?"

"Oh, I didn't know you were so bad as that," clasping her hands behind her head, and glancing blankly at the ceiling. "Where shall I begin? The day I left Miss Palethorpe's, amid universal lamentations? That was the only occasion, by the way, on which I've seen you——"

"I didn't. I had a cold."

"She had a cold, Gigi. Very well. So had Aunt Jane when I arrived home. Never shall I forget her expression as she said, 'So you've came home, dear Madge—for good!'"

Jess laughed. "But you had always led her rather a dance during your holidays, hadn't you?"

"Rather. I often wonder, when I remember what a dance I did lead her, that she ever had me home 'for good.' 'A sacred charge. I consider her a sacred charge from poor Herbert, and I do my best to fulfil it,' I used to hear her say to her friends, in varying tones of resignation; and she did fulfil it, poor old dear—according to her lights."

Something in her friend's manner suggested to Jess that the old lady's mission was at an end.

"Yes," said Madge, in answer to her inquiry. "She died two years after I left school. She had a stroke, and was quite helpless and almost childish for many months, and you can't believe how fond I got of her and how sorry I was when she died."

"The maternal instinct! You felt she was dependent on you——"

"Perhaps. At any rate, for nearly a year after her death, although I longed to come abroad I didn't, because I knew she would have disapproved; and even now I often don't do things that I want to do, because I know they would have shocked Aunt Jane."

"When you've told me all the things you have done, you must start on those you would have liked to do," said Jess, glad that any influence—even that of the defunct Miss Ockleston—should stand between Madge and her madder impulses. "What did you do?" she added. "You had relatives or friends . . .?"

"Not one. When Aunt Jane died I found myself with a thousand a year and not a relative or a friend. Of course I had plenty of acquaintances, but no one who could be of the slightest use in helping me to find a *modus vivendi*. So I had to find one for myself. The old house at Mirborough had been gloomy and depressing enough when there were two of us, but to stay there alone was impossible; so I answered an advertisement in a lady's paper

and went into a family as paying guest. The family was impossible—the family's friends *impossibilissimi!* I stayed there for a year, and then came abroad."

"You have never been back to England?"

Madge shook her head.

"And you enjoy a gipsy life?"

"I did at first—as much as the old pussies at the hotels and pensions would let me."

"Some advantages after all in being poor—and plain," said Jess. "I'm always most popular with the cat tribe. They purr to me by the hour about their doctors and their patent medicines and their titled relatives."

"Call those advantages? *We* don't want to hear about old cats' patent medicines, do we, Gigi?"—retying the ridiculously big bow which adorned Gigi's ridiculously small neck.

"Leave the poor little brute alone and go on with your story. You were saying that you are beginning to tire of travelling."

"No," said Madge, "I'm not tired of it—yet, but I see the time coming when I shall be—and it frightens me."

"Frightens you?"

Madge threw two or three pine-cones on to the fire and tried, not very successfully, to "bellows" them into a flame. "It must be dreadful," she said, settling herself comfortably again after her labours, "to feel that one has done everything, seen everything, experienced everything——"

"I don't believe you've experienced the one thing worth experiencing. Tell me, Madge"—a look of genuine interest in her eyes—"have you ever been in love?"

"Never!"

"Then don't talk of having experienced every——"

"I shall never experience that."

"Don't be too sure."

"If a woman arrives at the mature age of twenty-six without——"

"She'd better take care. When the complaint seizes one as late as that, there's the devil to pay."

"I'm not afraid. I'm not at all a likely subject to succumb to a *grande passion*. I should be satisfied if I could feel the slightest interest in any particular man, but—they *are* such ridiculous things, and they

*do* talk such nonsense, don't they, Gigi? We really can't. When they don't bore, they disgust me."

"Which does the Captain do?"

"Both. The one when he talks of himself—the other when he talks of me; and yet——"

"And yet?"—Madge pausing and pensively contemplating her shoe-buckles.

"I expect I shall end by marrying him."

"And be alternately bored and disgusted for the rest of your life?"

"The common lot. Why should I expect anything better? I've experienced nearly everything—except matrimony——"

"And what is supposed to precede matrimony. Why not wait until you have experienced that?"

"A physical impossibility. If I can tolerate the brute, that's all I ask."

"Is it essential that the 'brute' should be a foreigner?"

"Not essential, perhaps, but advisable. As the head of a humdrum, middle-class English establishment, I know I should be out of the picture—and probably in a very short time out of my mind; whereas married



to an Italian officer, I can imagine myself deriving a certain amount of amusement from our various moves and the consequent furnishing and 'colour scheming,' to say nothing of the satisfaction to be derived from the admiration of my husband's fellow-officers—and the jealousy of their wives."

"You know quite well, Madge, that you are talking nonsense—that you would tire of that sort of life in no time. And, remember, you can't put a husband into an agent's hands. . . . Ten o'clock!"—jumping up. "I must go. The door is shut at ten, but I suppose some one will let me in."

"Annunciatina and I will come with you," said Madge. "There's a full moon to-night, and I should love a walk."

"This is my 'guide' get-up. How do you like it?"

Jess had thrown on her golf cape and was sticking a murderous-looking pin through the Alpine hat, when she turned—to see the "Romola"-like figure of the previous moment transformed into a more "new-womanish-looking" woman than herself.

"The first year I was in Rome," Madge

explained—the tweed ulster and hat having been duly admired—"I spent six months studying the Roman Remains with a lady guide; and by the time we had finished I was so proficient that I thought it would be rather a joke to advertise myself as a guide; so I invested in these, put the telephone number of the hotel at which I was staying into an advertisement in the *Roman Herald* and—awaited results. My first clients were an American lady and her son. They telephoned one night to know if I could meet them the following morning at the Palatine. I could, and did. In spite of my business-like clothes, the mother, when I introduced myself, looked a trifle catty; but the son was geniality itself, and was so much interested in the Palatine that he insisted on making appointments for every morning during the following week."

"'Nuff said," laughed Jess.

"I wish you could have heard half the mother said," replied Madge, putting Gigi into one of her ulster pockets. "The proposal took place in Nero's House; the mother had stopped behind for a moment to consult Baedeker—she often did this in

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hopes of finding my information incorrect—and when she joined us her son and heir was laying his heart and hand at the female Baedeker's feet. 'A trap to catch a rich husband,' was one of the mildest and most refined of her reproaches. That was my first and last attempt at guiding; but what I want to know is, how a woman who is good-looking ever earns a living?"

"Never having been good-looking, I don't know," said Jess. "All I know is that it's hard enough to earn one when one's *not*."

## CHAPTER IV

THE following afternoon Jess was so afraid of missing any of the Tuscan accent that she had to sit through the whole of the Rosary. It was, however, with a decided sense of relief that she saw no sign of Madge.

"She was only joking. I thought the congregation and the atmosphere would act as deterrents," she said to herself; and the constant reiteration of Pater Nosters and Ave Marias made her so drowsy that when the moving of chairs told that the Rosary was over she came to the conclusion that she must have been to sleep.

"How any one can think that such a form of worship could appeal to the most long-suffering of Deities, I can't imagine. It's only one degree better than the Tibetan praying-machine," she thought; and then she smiled as she noticed one of her neighbours—an old woman who was evidently

deaf—still murmuring Aves and Paters in the friendliest and most colloquial manner, unconscious of the fact that the regulation number had long ago been said.

The congregation to-night was larger and if anything slightly less poverty-stricken—the *frate's* announcement that his sermon would treat of the "New Woman" having doubtless acted as a bait to the curious.

"I may come in for a thrust or two," thought Jess, wishing that her dress had not been quite so aggressively masculine; and it was with a sense of pleasant anticipation that she saw the *frate* enter the pulpit, and after a momentary prayer heard him greet his audience with his usual subdued "Signori."

The sermon was much more entertaining than that of the previous day. The *frate*—who evinced a delightful and quite unexpected sense of humour—had classed his subject under various headings—the literary, the artistic, the neurotic, the political, and the fashionable—and touching lightly upon the peculiarities of each he succeeded in eliciting now a smile, now a laugh, from the more intelligent among his listeners. The sermon was half over when a tilting of

chairs and turning of heads made Jess glance round to see what was happening.

"She's come! Why couldn't she stay at the back until the interval?" she thought, as Madge, chair in hand, with a succession of smiling "*Permesso's*," made her way to the place she had occupied the previous day—directly opposite the pulpit.

The *frate* at that moment was dissecting the woman of the world, and others besides Jess glanced smilingly at Madge's sable sacque, huge "granny" muff, and "cart-wheel" hat, as he spoke of the extravagant toilettes, the exaggerated coiffures, the ridiculous headgear, with which such women seek to attract attention. Madge was not heedless of the smiles which had greeted her opportune appearance, nor was she blind to the fact of the *frate's* unconsciousness that his text had been so aptly illustrated. "A man so keenly alive to the peculiarities of his neighbours ought to know that to address an audience without looking at it is ridiculous as well as rude," she thought; and however amusing the *frate's* hits—and he made some very amusing hits—she neither smiled nor laughed.

"She's horribly bored. She won't come again," thought Jess. Her surprise, therefore, was great when at the interval, instead of seizing the opportunity to escape, Madge stood up, and having taken off her coat and hung it over the back of her chair, sat down again, evidently determined to remain until the end.

"What a lovely dress, and so suitable for a Lenten sermon! What *does* she come here for?" Jess heard one old woman whisper to another; and the thoughts of more than one of Madge's neighbours took the same direction.

"I suppose I may have leanings towards Catholicism, and attend sermons in a spirit of inquiry, may I not?" said Madge when, the sermon over, she and Jess, having disentangled themselves from the crowd at the church door, made their way towards Via Condotti.

"You've no more leaning towards Catholicism than I have," said Jess; "and whatever takes you there, it isn't a spirit of inquiry. What is it?"

"Must a woman always have a reason for

what she does? By the way, that dear, good *frate* of yours knows a great deal about the sex—or thinks he does. I wonder where he derived his knowledge! One doesn't get to know women by looking over their heads."

A touch of irritation in her tone made Jess reflective.

"He can't always look over their heads," she said, "or he wouldn't be so scathing about their hats. You must show him that his shafts have struck home, by wearing a 'pill-box' to-morrow."

"If I were to wear a fez, he wouldn't—— Oh, you're not going, are you? Do come to dinner. It's so ghastly dining alone. Captain Tiberi and the Rawlings are coming afterwards to take me to see the Colosseum by——"

"Moonlight?"

"No, Bengal. One can't charge three *lire* each for moonlight. 'Change'? Of course not. I shan't."

"I should think you wouldn't! But this"—glancing at her serge coat and skirt. "Never mind, I'll be a good foil. That dear, good *frate* of mine, as you call him, forgot, in enumerating the different types of women-



kind, the poor unfortunate creature whose sole mission in life seems to be to act as foil to her better-looking friends."

"It's beautiful while it lasts, but it doesn't last long enough."

"Nothing lasts long enough."

"The sermon last night did. A jolly sight too long. You didn't really take on another to-night, did you, Miss Ockleston?"

Madge pretended not to hear.

"Why are they so economical?" she exclaimed, another glorious glow lighting up for an instant half a dozen of the gaunt grey arches, and as suddenly fading away. "They want another Nero to teach them how such things should be done."

"They've no Christians to act as candelabra," said Jess. "But you're all very hard to please. I think it's lovely."

It was lovely—in a way—a bizarre, theatrical way. The monstrous mass of stone, standing one moment white and spectral in the moonlight, the next, flashing and flaming with living fire.

"Like my life—since you came into it," whispered the Captain, when Madge com-

mented on the weirdness of the transformation.

The look he knew so well, and had learned to dread, was her sole response.

"Why," he asked, "do you always look at me like that when I——"

"Talk nonsense? Because I don't like nonsense."

"What *do* you like? You are always talking of your aversions, but——"

Madge sent an appealing glance to where Jess was standing. She did not wish to be left alone with the Captain to-night, if it could be avoided. An explanatory "That is where the beastly beasts were kept," telling her, however, that Jess was using Tom as guide, she laughed, and said—

"Oh, I like heaps of things—*marrons glacés, cassate alla Siciliana* chestnut cream."

"I don't mean things to eat."

"Well, I like Gigi, and"—another transitory glow lighting up for an instant her companion's tall picturesque figure—"I love your cloak."

"My cloak, yes! But do you think you could ev——"

"They're going to illuminate the arch.

See, the people are all moving over there, and the band has already gone! Come, Jess, the arch is always the *bonne bouche*. . . . The *popoli bassi*, who see what they can for nothing," she added, Jess drawing her attention to the sea of heads in the street above. "It is for their benefit the band plays the final piece out here."

"Take my arm—I will make a way for you," said the Captain, Madge standing reluctant on the edge of the crowd, and he chawed viciously at his moustache as Madge, glancing at the long circular cloak in which she was enveloped, replied—

"Thank you, I'd rather stay here—you see *I* haven't an arm."

"You may have your good qualities, Jess, but as a chaperone you're a fraud."

The Captain and the Rawlings had left Madge at her flat, and she and Jess were having some hot soup before going on to Jess's pension.

"I didn't think a chaperone was necessary," said Jess. "Having expressed your willingness to marry the 'brute,' I thought you were willing for him to propose."

"Did I express my willingness to marry him?" Madge held her spoon reflectively in mid-air. "Oh . . . I said something about 'in the end.' But this"—withdrawing her spoon just in time to escape Gigi's tongue—"is only the beginning, isn't it, Gigi? And who knows what delightful, interesting thing may happen—in the middle?"

"I wonder if it is like that! One moment one's life cold and grey and spectral—the next, all aglow with light and colour."

Madge was alone. She and Gigi were seated on the rug in front of her bedroom fire. She wore a white silk wrapper embroidered by the "black-eyed Neapolitan." Her hair, parted in the middle, fell in two heavy plaits to her waist. Her bare feet were thrust into a pair of red Persian slippers.

"What do you think, Gigi? Do you think that any horrid man could act as Bengal light to Missis' life?" As she spoke, she held her "forty-lire-worth-of-dog" up in front of her—her loose sleeves falling back and revealing a pair of smooth rounded arms. "You think Missis' life is not bad

without Bengal lights? Well," taking one of her plaits and winding it playfully round Gigi's neck, "perhaps you are right. Perhaps you've got rather a discontented Missis. Yet I can't help wondering. . . . And the *frate!*"—laughing as she unwound the plait and dangled the ribboned end in Gigi's face—"his life, I'm sure, has never been 'Bengal-lighted.' I wonder if it ever—*will!*"

This train of thought led easily to another. What sort of woman would appeal to a man like that? Could any woman appeal? Then unconsciously, dreamily, she began to picture to herself what the pale, ascetic face would look like under the transforming influence of a consuming passion.

"Those cold natures, they say, are the most inflammable; so I am afraid, Gigi, should Mr. Monk ever meet his Bengal light, there'd be a more extravagant illumination than there was to-night. In fact, as your Auntie Jess would say, 'there'd be the devil to pay!'"

## CHAPTER V

"WHERE does Miss Ockleston go every afternoon? I'd as soon dance with a Cinderella!"

The speaker—a good-looking young American who never missed a *tea-ballante* if he could help it—had some reason to be annoyed. This was not the first time that Miss Ockleston, always the belle at any social function at which she happened to be present, had stopped in the middle of a dance, consulted her watch, pleaded a pressing engagement—and disappeared.

"Perhaps she has a lesson," suggested one of the bystanders. "We all take lessons here—music, singing, Italian."

The young man was not satisfied. No one need tell him that a girl would lose half of one of his dances for a—lesson. Besides, this particular "lesson" seemed to monopolise the whole afternoon. Last time

Madge had disappeared shortly before six. To-day her engagement had been for 4.30.

Unconscious of the curiosity she had left behind her, Madge hurried down Via Babuino, along Via della Croce, and into the Corso. As she crossed the road and mounted the steps of San Luino a mischievous smile played about her lips, an unwonted colour rose to her cheeks.

"He'll look at me to-day . . . he'll be bound to look at me to-day!" she thought, lifting the heavy curtain and passing into the church, empty except for half a dozen old women. Bending over one of these, she whispered—

"The *frate* is hearing confessions?"

The old woman nodded, and glanced towards a neighbouring confessional. Madge also glanced towards it. The folding doors of the middle compartment being closed, the confessor was invisible. At either side knelt a penitent, one waiting—her head bent, rosary in hand; the other, with her face pressed closely to the perforated grating through which she was mumbling in a subdued, husky voice. They were both of the *popoli bassi*, as were two or three other women, who,

kneeling on an adjacent bench, awaited their turn. Madge drew a chair close to these, and sitting down, began to unbutton her gloves. Now that the time had come, she felt absurdly nervous. Gone was the smile of mischievous delight with which at the close of yesterday's sermon she had heard the *frate* announce that owing to the solicitation of various members of his audience, he would in future hear confessions for an hour every afternoon. Gone the glow of mingled triumph and confusion with which she had seen the speaker glance as he spoke at three letters he held in his hand—letters the writing of which had proved a world of trouble the previous night—to herself and Gigi. How astonished they would be, she thought, now glancing at her neighbours, could they know to whom they owed the privilege of confiding their poor little tales of woe to the celebrated Father Pampalloni. By this time the *frate's* fame as a preacher had been noised abroad, and not only was there a fight for chairs every day at San Luino, but standing-room was at a premium. In spite of this sudden leap into fame the *frate's* manner had remained unchanged. He still began his



sermon with his usual low, almost inaudible "Signori." He still addressed himself to some unseen auditor, suspended high above the heads of his congregation. He still was provokingly unconscious of the fact that for a whole fortnight one of the loveliest women in Rome, night after night, and in spite of endless engagements, had haunted San Luino in a vain attempt to win a glance from his dreamy, "other-worldly" eyes.

"I wish they'd be quick. The people will be coming for the Rosary, and I don't want to be seen," thought Madge, her fellow-penitents taking, she considered, an unconscionable time to unburden themselves; but when at length only one old woman stood between her and her turn, her impatience suddenly changed to fear. Suppose she should make a mistake? Suppose he should suspect? The thought made her turn hot, then cold. Yet why should she make a mistake? Why should he suspect? Had not she and Gigi pored for hours last night over the "form for confession" in a Catholic prayer-book? Had she not made Gigi's hair—what little he boasted—stand on end with the awful sins

to which she had pleaded guilty in her dress rehearsal? . . .

"If the Signorina does not wish to take her turn——"

The last penitent had disappeared; a late comer wished to take her place. An instant Madge hesitated.

"If I don't, I'll never be able to look Gigi in the face again—after all the ink and paper we wasted." And with an impatient "Of course I want to take my turn," she rose and, walking to the confessional, knelt down in the vacant place.

Her heart thumped in so ridiculous a manner, she did not notice how hard was the kneeling-board, how difficult it was to dispose of one's hands; all she was conscious of was the dark shadow behind the grating—the shadow of a bent, tonsured head.

"Father, I am not a Catholic."

These were not the words she had rehearsed last night with Gigi. Why had she uttered them? She herself could not have told. Was it that, kneeling here in a place sanctified by the recital of so many a tale of human frailty, of human pain, she felt she could not, dare not, act a lie? Or had it

suddenly struck her that, in proclaiming herself a heretic, she would the more surely attract the *frate's* attention?

If the latter were the solution of the problem, Madge was doomed to disappointment. The bent head remained bent. There was no surprise, no hint even of curiosity, in the quiet "Then why, my child, are you here?"

"I—I have attended your sermons," said Madge.

A pause, and again the quiet voice inquired—

"You are in sympathy with Catholicism, my child?"

"I can't say that I am in sympathy with it, but I should like to know more about it."

"To what denomination do you belong, my child?"

"To none."

"And you are happy, leading a Godless life?"

Madge made an impatient movement. She had not gained her point and was being catechised like a child.

"I don't know," she said, "that belief is essential to happiness."

"I do. There can be no happiness for a

creature out of sympathy with, unconscious even of the existence of its Creator. Man is not sufficient unto himself."

"He doesn't even know my sex. Why *can't* he look at me?" thought Madge, her cheeks flushing, and there was a touch of impatience in her voice as she said—

"I am a woman."

"So I supposed, my child."

The amusement in his voice made Madge's cheeks grow still hotter.

"He thinks me not only a woman, but a fool."

"I was speaking," continued the *frate*, "in a general way. The major, of course, includes the minor."

"Oh, we're the minor, are we?" thought Madge. "*Wait——*" and again the mischievous light danced in her eyes as she said—

"I thought, if you would not mind suggesting a course of reading——"

"A course of instruction would be better, my child. When one reads so many difficulties occur; whereas if the teaching of the Church is explained to you, the difficulties can be met as they arise. Are you making a long stay in Rome?"

"I live here."

"Then, should you wish it, I will ask the Father Prior if I may give you a course of instruction; and if you will come here at this hour to-morrow I will tell you his reply. The instruction would, of course, be given at the monastery."

"Of course," murmured Madge; but her expression of gratitude the *frate* waved aside.

"I shall be only too delighted," he said, "should any poor words of mine be the means of putting you on the path that leads, not only to heavenly but to earthly happiness."

"*You* are happy?"

The words escaped her almost unconsciously, and Madge trembled as she awaited the rebuff she felt they deserved, and she was relieved when with his usual gentleness the *frate* replied—

"Perfectly happy; and I hope that you will soon find happiness where I have found it—in the only place where it is to be found. And now"—with a little movement towards his other penitent—"God bless you, my child. I shall remember you in my prayers."

She had been dismissed—dismissed in favour of an ugly old peasant woman redolent of garlic—and other things!

Certainly, if she were in search of new experiences, Madge was finding them. Yet it was with no sense of defeat that, at the *frate's* bidding, she rose and left the confessional. On the contrary, her lips curved into a smile that spelled something very different from defeat, as, giving one last glance at the tonsured head—already inclined towards the opposite grating—she whispered a *sotto voce* "*Wait!*"

That evening, at the conclusion of the announcements, the *frate* asked his audience to add to their nightly prayers three Aves for "a soul in whose conversion he was interested—a poor lost soul struggling towards the light."

## CHAPTER VI

"I HOPE you didn't forget to say your three Aves last night?"

Madge and Jess were mounting the steep road leading to San Onofrio. It being Jess's first visit to Rome most of her time was devoted to sight-seeing, and this morning's programme included the church and monastery of San Onofrio, the Passeggiáta Marguerita, and San Pietro in Montorio. Although only the middle of March, the sun was so hot that every now and then the friends had to pause and rest for a few moments before continuing their way.

"Aves? Oh, you mean for the *frate's* friend?"

"For the 'poor lost soul struggling towards the light.' If struggling towards the light is half as hard work as struggling up this hill, I don't envy the soul."

Something in Madge's tone, something in the look she cast over her shoulder as once again she began the climb, drew from Jess an indignant "You don't mean to say *that you——!*"

"You didn't guess? Oh for the intelligence of a dog? As soon as ever I told Gigi *he* guessed, didn't you, Mr. Solomon?"—dangling her feather boa within an inch of Gigi's nose, then gradually raising it higher and higher, until Gigi grew desperate between frustrated desire and a lack of confidence in a pair of abnormally short hind-legs.

*"Madge!"*

Madge laughed. "Now we're in for a sermon! She might at least have waited until we reached the church. Let us take it seated, and admire the view." And seating herself on the low stone wall which enclosed the monastery walls, Madge put on her boa, and picking up Gigi, said—

"We're ready, but don't be hard on us. After all, I only told him——"

*"You've spoken to him?"*

"If you'll sit down, and not look so horrified, I'll tell you all about it."



Jess sat down.

"You remember the letters the *frate* spoke about having received the other night?"

Jess nodded.

"We wrote them."

"*You!*"

"Gigi and I, in three different hands. It was after the sermon on confession, so I thought the *frate* would naturally congratulate himself on having touched the hearts of three of his audience, and imagine that the letters were the result. Fortunately there are always old women ready to confess to anybody—much more to the celebrated Frate Pampalloni—so I was not alone."

"You confessed?"

"I meant to. At the last moment I changed my mind and told the truth."

"That you were there for fun?"

"*Macché!* That I was a heretic—that I should like to be instructed in the dogmas of Catholicism. And I am going to be instructed—by him."

Jess tried to look shocked, but there was something so comical in the picture of

Madge craving instruction in the dogmas of Catholicism that she laughed instead.

"But why, Madge? If you will only tell me *why* you are making a fool of the poor unfortunate man!"

With the point of her sunshade Madge traced an elaborate pattern on the gravel pathway. Then looking up—in her eyes her old "schoolgirl" smile—

"Why have you toiled up that awful hill in this awful heat? In the hope of experiencing a pleasant thrill at the sight of the place where a dead poet lived, or the room in which he died. Why shouldn't I put myself in the way of experiencing a similar thrill on seeing the place where a live monk lives, the place in which in all probability he will die?"

"Gammon!" said Jess, settling her hat at a less rakish angle. "The instructions are to take place in the monastery?"

"If the Father Prior approves; and of course he will approve. Part of a monk's mission is to convert the heathen, and if the heathen in question is known to be English and presumed to be rich. . . . But come!"—rising and calling Gigi. "If

you don't begin thrilling, you'll never get in the regulation number before luncheon."

"If I am converted, I shall come here every morning for Mass," said Madge when—the Tasso room and MSS having been inspected—the friends wandered round the dim, medieval-looking little church. "I like it ever so much more than the great garish show-places. How any one ever *prays* in St. Peter's or St. John's or Santa Maria Maggiore, I can't think; but I suppose no one does—except the poor. They will pray anywhere, provided there is a statue—preferably black—to which to address their prayers."

"If you want to attend Mass here every day you'd better enter the convent next door," said Jess. "should your monk convert you, he's sure to chase you into a convent."

"Do you hear that, Gigi? Missis is going to be chased into a convent, and little doggies will have to be left outside. I don't believe," turning to Jess, "they'd let him in, even if I were to put him into trousers, do you?"

• • • • •

"You're due for another thrill! That's the oak under which Tasso used to sit and meditate."

The friends on leaving the monastery had walked some distance along the high road when Madge paused before a stone bench, shadowed by an ancient-looking tree.

"Tasso had a great eye to a view!" exclaimed Jess. "No, I won't sit down. Not being a poet, I don't affect stone benches when I'm bent on meditation. But what a view!"

"It's lovelier still farther on," said Madge, "and at sunset it's indescribable. Yet one hardly ever sees a carriage here in the afternoon. It shows how hide-bound these people are! The Pincio and the Corso are so crowded at sunset that one doesn't drive—one crawls; while here the whole place is deserted, except for an occasional party of sight-seeing foreigners."

San Pietro in Montorio afforded no "thrills," and even when the old monk-guide led Jess into the chapel built on the spot on which St. Peter was crucified she shocked him by her lack of enthusiasm.

"Sand from the hole in which stood the Cross," he explained, ladling up some yellowish-looking stuff by means of a fishing-rod-like appliance, and presenting it to her with an air which said, "If that doesn't stir your stagnant English blood, nothing will."

"What is one expected to do with it?" she asked, turning laughingly to Madge.

"Immaterial. The *soldo's* the thing," and Madge slipped something into the monk's hand, which made him mutter to himself as he hobbled away that if these *forestieri* were unimpressionable, they at least were generous.

"You can send it to a Catholic friend," said Madge, as they left the church—Jess still clutching her unsolicited sand; "but if you do, be sure to write 'liquid relics' on the envelope. I know a girl who sent some to her mother, and when she opened the letter the old lady was sitting up in bed eating a poached egg. . . . 'Curtain, to slow music'!"

"I'm afraid I have no relic-loving friends," said Jess; and she was on the point

of throwing the sand away when she exclaimed, "No, I won't—I'll keep it, and give it to Don Quixote. It will make him laugh. . . . Oh!"—in reply to Madge's inquiry—"haven't I told you about Don Quixote? He's a dear old Spaniard who's staying at my pension. He and his son have been there all winter. He is writing a book about Rome, and the boy is supposed to be studying art. I'm in love with the father, but the son is loathsome. Thinks of nothing but his nerves, and makes the poor old man wait on him hand and foot. You must come to dinner some night, and be introduced to them—if you'll promise not to flirt with Don Quixote. He's *my* property."

Madge promising "to be good and to talk nerves with the son," it was arranged that she should dine with Jess the following night.

By this time they had reached one of Rome's most famous view-points, a broad open space at some little distance below the church.

"It was here that the hero of Zola's *Rome* came to meditate on the night of his arrival,

don't you remember?" said Madge, seating herself on the low parapet and taking Gigi on her knee.

"I don't *want* to look through a telescope!—I *hate* mosaics!—and I *never* buy post cards. What a nuisance these men are!" said Jess. "Zola's hero did well to come at night to meditate—I'd defy any one to meditate here by day."

"But you mustn't be cross with me and Gigi," laughed Madge. "*We* haven't asked her to look through a telescope, to have three brooches for a *lira*, or to buy a post card, have we, dearest?" And holding Gigi within an inch of the scowling face—"Kiss your Auntie Jess, and tell her to be good and to admire the view. . . . That ugly building with the scaffolding round it? The Victor Emmanuel Monument. The funds gave out when it was half finished; and as there seems no likelihood of raising more, before it is finished people will have forgotten who Victor Emmanuel was. Isn't it impossible," she added, looking down at the medley of churches, palaces, hotels, pensions, and ruins, "to realise that that is Rome—the Rome?"

"*Impossibilissima!*" sighed Jess. "I gave

up the attempt the day I arrived. It has all been so modernised, so vulgarised, so—no English about?”—looking over her shoulder—“so Anglicised, that it is no longer Rome.”

“Yet there *are* times,” said Madge, “when the new Rome, with its giant hotels, its electric trams, its English churches and its ‘tea-rooms,’ seems the dream—and the old, the pagan Rome, the reality. I remember, one evening, as I drove along the Appian Way by moonlight . . . Yes, Gigi, you may well look injured; romantic reminiscences are all very well, aren’t they, but what about your macaroni?”

“Do you know how *I* manage them?” Another crowd of mosaic and post-card men having waylaid the two *forestieri* as they got into the carriage Madge had hailed, she told the driver to drive on, and if necessary, over them. “As soon as one appears, I ask him the way somewhere—anywhere—provided it is far off, and entails complicated directions. By the time the directions have been given the man is too exhausted to press his wares, and I walk on unmolested. An-



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other subject for an article—"Timely Hints to Tortured Tourists." You can't say that this morning hasn't been rich in copy, if it has been somewhat disappointing in the matter of thrills."

## CHAPTER VII

CAPTAIN TIBERI was present when Madge's Cinderella-like disappearances were discussed at the *tea-ballante*. "Where can she go?" he asked himself, pooh-poohing, as the American had pooh-poohed, the "lesson" solution of the mystery. "Can she go every night to San Luino? If so, why does she go sometimes at six, sometimes so much earlier?"

It was an informal dance at an English pension. No one would be any the wiser should he stroll along to San Luino and satisfy his curiosity. Madge need know nothing of his curiosity, or of the means he had taken to satisfy it. Every Italian, he knew, would justify such means, but he was not sure how they might appeal to an Inglese.

Arrived at San Luino, he knelt down in a dark corner near the entrance. He saw

Madge kneeling at the far end of the choir. He saw her enter the confessional.

"Good God!" he said to himself. "What does it mean? She's a heretic—an atheist—to judge from her conversation. What is she doing in the confessional?"

He noted Madge's heightened colour, the strange smile in her eyes as she returned to her place. Then he flung out of the church, almost knocking down an old peasant woman who happened to be coming in.

"Could she be in love with the fellow? In love with a *frate*?—a woman like Madge, who would not listen to a word of love from——!" The handsome face grew livid. The black eyes flashed in a manner that made the little dwarf who sat begging alms on the church steps cross himself and make the sign against the evil eye.

At 7.30 the stream of people that for the past few hours had made the Corso impassable had dispersed, and the great doors of San Luino were about to close when a solitary figure emerged—a figure clad in a rough serge habit, with sandalled feet, and cowl drawn closely about a pale, ascetic face.

"*Scusi!*"

The *frate* looked up. The speaker was an officer. His face was livid. His eyes met those of the *frate* with a glance of keen, almost impertinent curiosity.

"*Scusi tanto,*" he said. "That Englishwoman who confessed to you to-night——"

"No Englishwoman confessed to me."

"I—saw her."

A light flashed across the *frate's* mind. "An Englishwoman did come to the confessional——"

"She's a heretic!" The words were hissed out like a challenge.

"I know it," said the *frate*.

"Then why was she in the confessional?"

The *frate* glanced at his questioner in surprise. Was he mad? If not, why those livid cheeks, that panting, laboured breath?

"The lady wishes to be instructed in the dogmas of Catholicism."

"He *is* mad!" Instinctively the *frate* recoiled, the other breaking into a harsh, strident laugh.

"*You* are to instruct her?"

"If it be God's will, and the wish of the Father Prior."

Another laugh, harsher and more strident than the last. "She doesn't believe in God!"

The *frate's* face contracted—he had taken Madge for a heretic, not for an atheist—but it was only for an instant; the next he was saying, a strange, unearthly light in his eyes—

"She *shall* believe in Him!"

"You think you can make her?" Another strident laugh.

"I can try. Then after a momentary pause—"The Signore is a Catholic?"

"Of a sort."

"Then pray for this friend of yours—I suppose she is a friend? She will need our prayers." With a courteous "*Buona notte*," the *frate* passed on.

"Pray for *her*? Pray for *you*, you poor fool! You need prayers more than she does!" And with another laugh—this time purely contemptuous—the Captain also passed into the night.

## CHAPTER VIII

"JESS, you're no use at all. I don't wonder your books don't sell. Imagine a novelist having no idea how 'a poor lost soul struggling towards the light' should dress herself for the part!"

"I should suggest sackcloth and ashes—for your sins."

"Doesn't sound becoming, does it, Gigi? And to-day it's essential we should be 'becomed.' Your Uncle Pampalloni is going to see Missis for the first time, and we want him to think of her only as 'a soul.' What do you say to my grey, with the chinchilla coat and toque? It must be a toque, after——"

"What you wear is immaterial; but I shouldn't be late for my appointment if I were you," said Jess, looking at her watch. "It's ten now, and it takes quite an hour to get to San Michel."

Had de Amicis been in the San Michel tram that morning at about 10.30 he would have added another chapter to his "Carriago for all," called "The Girl in Grey." Although no psychological novelist was present, the attention of more than one of the passengers was attracted to Madge, who, in her soft grey furs and with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, sat communing with her own thoughts—pleasant thoughts, judging from the smile which every now and then played about her lips. Of all the "mad things" she had ever done, in a life remarkable for the doing of mad things, Madge owned to herself that this was the maddest. But how much more interesting it was to do mad things than sane! How infinitely more entertaining to be bent on interviewing a romantic-looking young monk in his monastery on the plea of studying Catholicism, than to be bound for any of the conventional goals for which, she felt sure, all her neighbours were bound! Jess had seen her into the tram and left her with a warning "You're playing with fire—you'd better look to your fingers!" and as she remembered the disapproval which had been expressed in

her very walk as she watched her disappear, the smile faded from her lips.

"Dear old Jess! she's almost as bad as Aunt Jane," she said to herself; and she felt a twinge of remorse as she realised how horrified that good lady would be, could she know what she were doing.

"I won't think about it," she told herself. "I won't think of anything disagreeable to-day. To-day is to be a red-letter day."

Hardly had she taken the resolution when she looked up, to see that her *vis-à-vis*—a sour-looking Englishwoman clutching a Baedeker—had disappeared, and been replaced by a fat, unwashed, ungroomed, and unshaven priest. Shudderingly she looked at him.

"*'Roma veduta—fede perduta.'* . . . Surely," she thought, "the originator of the saying must have had in mind the Roman priest"; and she wondered what she should do, should the Father Prior send some one like this to instruct her. Unconscious of the feeling he inspired in the beautiful Englishwoman, the priest cast a glance at Madge which made her cheeks flame.

"Better far the *frate's* dreamy, unseeing



gaze than admiration of that sort," she thought; and turning as she realised that in a few moments now she and the *frate* would be face to face.

"The Signorina must descend here for the monastery. That building to the right," explained the conductor, as Madge left the tram.

"What an ugly church! and the monastery is worse," thought Madge, the new barrack-like, red-brick building striking her as anything but a suitable dwelling-place for a medieval-looking monk. "I suppose those are the cells," looking up at the rows of small windows. "I wonder which is his?"

The interior of the church proved as new and unattractive as the exterior. "Tasso's monastery would be a much more romantic place to—to be instructed in," Madge was thinking, when the monk in charge came and asked if she wished to see over the church. Hearing that Madge had an appointment with Father Pampalloni, the monk led her to a door at the far end of the church and rang the bell. The door was opened by another monk, who with a courteous "*Favorici!*" led the way up a

long, bare passage to what was evidently the reception-room, and with a smiling "*S'accomodi*," pointed to a chair and left her.

"How can a man with a face like a Greek cameo live in such a place?" The white-washed walls, bare, but for a crucifix and two or three oleographs of livid-looking saints; the tiled floor; the crudely painted statue of San Michel under a glass shade on the table—Madge took it all in at a glance, and shuddered. Then suddenly she smiled.

"To-day at any rate he will have something nice to look at!"

A sound peculiar to sandalled feet on a tiled floor. She turned her head. He was there. He was standing within a few feet of her. At last the dreamy, vision-seeing eyes had come down to earth. They were gazing into hers. Was her first feeling one of disappointment? Certainly the look she had expected—the look her beauty never failed to elicit—was not there. Yet there was admiration in the look; detached, impersonal admiration, such as one bestows on a beautiful picture, a beautiful flower. So Jess had looked at her when she said,

"How tremendously good-looking you have grown!"; so she herself had looked, often and often, at the sunset from the Pincio.

"It is nice to be admired as a woman; but it is much more novel to be admired as though one were a Sassoferrato or a sunset!" Such would have been Madge's reply to an accusation of disappointment; and certainly there was no trace of disappointment in her manner as, with a smiling "*Buon' giorno*," she moved towards the *frate* with outstretched hand.

"Handshaking is evidently not allowed," she thought, the *frate* returning her greeting with a bow, then offering her a chair.

With a naïveté delightfully and unexpectedly boyish, he broke the awkward pause which followed by a laughing "Would you mind telling me your name?" And having repeated it two or three times—"I can't manage it. I'm afraid I'll have to call you 'Signorina,' if you don't mind."

Madge did not mind, and said that if *he* didn't mind, "she'd take off her coat, as the room was rather hot." He did not offer to help her. He watched her remove her stole and muff and jacket, and lay them

on the table, with the amused interest with which a child might watch the movements of some new specimen at the Zoo. If either felt any embarrassment, it was Madge.

"Will he begin by discussing the weather, or shall we have to dive at once into dogma?" she wondered, as she returned to her place.

"We usually begin the instruction with a prayer," said the *frate*—then marking Madge's look of embarrassment, "I shall do the praying at present. Later, I hope you will join me." With the simple unself-consciousness which characterised all his movements, the young priest knelt down and, crucifix in hand, exclaimed—

"O God!—God of the unbeliever as of the believer, bless this work that I am about to undertake; and grant that, should it prove futile, the fault lie not with any want of zeal upon my part, or upon the lack of an honest endeavour to believe on the part of this Thy child, who knows not her Father, and who is unhappy in her ignorance. Teach her to know Thee, that she may love Thee as I love Thee—as all Thy creatures must love Thee, our Creator, our Father, our God."

Often in her childhood and her girlhood Madge—in consequence of something she had done—had been told that she ought to feel ashamed of herself. In those days the more cause—according to her superiors—she had had to feel shame, the less shame she had felt. Now, however, as the *frate* resumed his place, his face aglow with some feeling she could but dimly understand—“the feeling of a fanatic about to wrestle with Satan for a soul”—she felt ashamed, horribly, miserably ashamed.

“Shall I tell him that I am a fraud? That I am here not to be instructed, but simply to dissipate an attack of ennui, to indulge in a new sensation?”

The confession was on her lips when the *frate* exclaimed—

“You will make things easier for me if you will tell me exactly how you stand in regard to revealed religion. To begin with—Do you believe in God?”

Ten years ago Madge would have considered such a question an insult. Now she took it as a matter of course—the most rational query with which the *frate* could have begun his instruction.

"It seems to me," she said, "that there is more proof against than for His existence."

The *frate* smiled.

"You are one of those who will believe only what is proved?"

Madge made a movement of assent.

"Have you never *felt* that there is a God?"

For a moment Madge was silent. The other's sincerity compelled her to be sincere, and she was thinking.

"Once," she said at last, "when some one I loved was dying——"

Suspecting from the break in her voice that the subject was a painful one, the *frate* interposed. "And, surely, at less tragic moments—on a day like this . . . when you are very happy . . . when you are rejoicing in the society of those you love—have you never felt that there must be Someone who is responsible for the beauty of the world, for your sense of well-being, for the gift of love and of the power to love? That there must be Someone you can *thank*? But let that pass"—Madge's expression warning him that it must be to her intellect, not to her heart, he must

appeal—"I want you to tell me now, one by one, what you consider the proofs for the non-existence of a God? If I should be fortunate enough to convince you that those proofs are not proofs, or, at least, are inconclusive, we shall have laid the foundation for our future work."

Had Miss Palenthorpe been present during the following hour she would have been forced to admit that Jess's estimate of Madge's character had been juster than her own. No girl as really frivolous as Madge seemed could at a moment's notice have marshalled so many and such logical proofs for the non-existence of a Deity. The *frate* was surprised. Did all Englishwomen, he wondered, divert themselves by reading controversial literature in three or four languages? But although surprised, the *frate* was not nonplussed. Having been trained for a preacher and a controversialist, he had been obliged to read not only the arguments against Catholicism but also against Deism; and he was not half so much astonished by the evidence of Madge's wide and varied reading as were she by the evidence of his. All trace of "boyishness"

vanished as one by one he met and strove—not always successfully—to refute Madge's arguments. He was on his own ground now, and so sound was his logic, so lucid were his explanations, so graphic and apt his illustrations, and so telling his brief lapses into emotionalism, that more than once Madge felt herself regretting that she was his sole auditor.

"Thank you very much!—but I am ashamed that you should waste so much time, so much eloquence, on me," she said, when at length, with a smiling, "That, I think, must do for to-day," the *frate* brought his instruction to an end.

The *frate* laughed his simple, boyish laugh. "There is no happiness like the happiness of winning a soul to God!"

"But suppose——"

"We will suppose no such thing. The only obstacle in the way of your conversion would be, what I have prayed there may not be, a lack on your part of the honest endeavour to believe. If you will promise me that that shall *not* be lacking——"

Madge looked into the earnest eyes in which, as they met hers there was no *arrière*



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*pensée*—nothing but an enthusiasm, absurd, perhaps, from her point of view, but infinitely beautiful, infinitely touching—and into her own leaped a look of mingled shame and sincerity as she uttered a low “I promise.”

## CHAPTER IX

AT the close of that evening's sermon Jess was met at the church door by Madge, who was to dine with her. Jess was devoured by curiosity to know the result of the morning's visit to the monastery, but before she had time to ask, Madge exclaimed—

"Oh, Jess, I feel so ashamed!"

"Ashamed?"

"Yes, ashamed. Just as one might feel if one has read somebody else's letter, or listened at a door, or done any of the dreadful things one never does do——"

"But why?"

"The man's a saint, a real saint—not plaster. And I—well, I'm a miserable sinner."

Had the Corso not been so crowded, Jess would have whistled. As it was, she screwed up her mouth in a manner peculiar

to her when denied the more masculine method of expressing surprise.

"Did the *frate* convince you of the fact?"

"I didn't need convincing. I felt a *worm* from the moment he knelt down and asked a blessing on his work—the work being my conversion."

The picture portrayed by Madge had its comic element, and not until she had indulged in one of her deepest "baritones" did Jess ask—

"How did you get out of it?"

"I didn't get out."

"You let him begin—the work?"

Madge nodded. "He will continue it at eleven to-morrow!"

"The worm-like sensation must appeal more to you than it would to me."

"Perhaps I shan't always feel a worm. Perhaps . . . Do you think there's the faintest possibility of his converting me?"

Again Jess—startled by the other's eagerness, by a wistfulness as becoming as it was novel—would like to have whistled, but again she resisted the temptation.

"A Greek profile, a romantic *mise en scène*, a picturesque dress—perhaps—who knows?"

Madge laughed, but the wistfulness which had proved so surprising to Jess returned as she exclaimed, "It must be wonderful to believe as he believes. Oh, you needn't look like that! I've always *longed* to believe."

"That's good, for a start. The wish may be father to the thought. But, Madge, if you are converted, do try to be a rational convert. As a rule converts are such loathsome animals.—Here we are!"

"Madge, let me introduce my friend, Señor Montero."

Madge bowed to the small dapper-looking old man who came forward and kissed her hand with the grace natural to his nationality.

"Miss Ockleston speaks French and Italian, but not Spanish," Jess explained, as the trio seated themselves at a dinner-table set for four.

"Miss Weatherdon and I are exchanging lessons in English and Spanish, but I'm afraid I should not do her credit—yet," said Señor Montero, speaking Italian.

Madge looked surprised. She had heard

nothing of this interchange of languages. "When you are proficient, you must teach me," she said, turning to Jess. Then in reply to a query from Señor Montero—"Yes, I love learning a new language—to struggle with a new grammar is to me a *gran divertimento*."

"I wish it were to Señor Montero," said Jess. "He believes in the conversational method. So do I, when one converses in the language one is supposed to be learning, but I fail to see how it helps one's knowledge of English to converse, as he invariably does—in French."

"You should go to England," advised Madge. "The only way to learn a language—— What is the matter, Jess?"

"Señor Montero did go to England—last summer," Jess explained, as soon as she had stopped laughing. "He and his son went for two years and came back in a month. See, he is shivering at the thought."

Señor Montero *was* shivering. "What a climate!" he said; "and—no offence meant to you two charming ladies—what a people! From the time we landed—in a deluge, of course—until our return, we never

once saw the sun, we never once heard a word of anything but English."

"That," said Madge, "was what you went for—to hear English."

"To hear English, yes; but how is one to live while one is hearing it, if no one understands what one says, what one wishes to eat? Not a porter at the stations, not an employee in the shops, not a *padrona* of a boarding-house—and of course not a servant—knew a word even of French. I thought every one knew French—until I went to England."

Madge laughed. "In spite of our ignorance you didn't starve. How did you manage?" she asked, quite envying her friend the companionship of this vivacious little man, with the complexion of a school-boy, the hair of a Father Christmas, and the eyes of an innocent Don Juan.

"We pointed at things we wanted, if they were there to be pointed at. If not, we took what people *thought* we wanted, and when paying-time came we held out a handful of money and let them take what *they* wanted."

"How popular you must have been! I wonder they let you come away!"

"They were rather loth to—but the

climate! People had told us we should try Ventnor in winter; so failing to get warm in London, in August, we went there—and froze, in spite of wearing our heaviest winter clothes.”

“I wasn’t in England last summer,” said Madge; “but I think, from your account, it must have been an excep——”

“It was,” interrupted Jess; “but I don’t think Señor Montero will try another.”

The old man shook his head. “If Carlos wants to learn English, he must learn it here.”

“By the way,” asked Jess, “where is Señor Carlos?”

Señor Montero shrugged his shoulders.

“A new cinematograph was announced to-day at Piazza Termini.”

“Is Señor Carlos a cinematograph fiend?” asked Madge.

“Hopeless. Never misses one. That was his chief grievance against England. He could have put up with the climate, and the hardship of only having me to talk to, but to live in a country innocent of cinematographs——”

.. . . .

"Tell Marietta I hope she's going to give us Zapononi to-night," whispered Jess to the woman who was waiting; and a moment later a sliding panel in the wall—uniting the dining-room with the kitchen—was withdrawn, and a coquettish little face, crowned by a mass of elaborately dressed hair, appeared in the aperture.

"I'm so sorry, Signorina—I forgot the eggs! But *paziénza!* you shall have *zuppa Inglese.*"

"The *fidanzato* helped you with the marketing this morning, *vero?*" laughed Señor Montero, and the quick flush on the rounded cheeks, the sudden appearance of two rows of glittering teeth, told that the shaft had struck home.

"Señor Montero is a novelist," explained Jess, "and failing other 'copy' he weaves romances about Marietta and her *fidanzato*, a baker's assistant of an Othello-like cast of countenance, who haunts the staircase in the hope of catching his lady-love making love to somebody else's *fidanzato*. He found her the other day exchanging civilities with the postman, and Marietta's eyes were red for a week afterwards."



"Good thing they were not black," laughed Madge.

"Red before—black after—marriage."

"Forbidden subject! You're not to try to make an anti-matrimonialist of Miss Ockleston," said Jess.

Señor Montero cast one of his innocently Don Juanish glances at Madge. "I never attempt the impossible. I can only hope that your friend may be fortunate enough to draw a prize in the riskiest of all lotteries." Then, unable—as Jess had known he would be—to resist the temptation to mount his hobby-horse, "How any rational man or woman *can*——"

"You did?" in a tone of inquiry, from Madge.

"I am a fool—or was. I suppose, so long as man is man and woman is woman, every one is, has been, or will be—a fool. My sincerest wish for you—in spite of Miss Weatherdon's warning—is that you may prove an exception. Miss Weatherdon has promised that she will."

"I said I'd never had a chance of doing otherwise, and never should."

The Don Juanish eyes rested very kindly

—tenderly, Madge thought—on the bright, humorous face.

“You can’t expect me,” he said, “to think so little of the discrimination of my sex as to believe that!”

“What a delightful old man! But why so rabid against matrimony?”

“Been badly hit. I can’t make out how. The people here say the wife died when Carlos was ten years old; but I hardly think he would speak of matrimony as he does—especially before the son—if she were dead.” As she spoke, Jess drew up a table to her bedroom fire and placed on it the coffee she had just made.

“Three cups!” exclaimed Madge.

“I’m going to take one to Don Quixote. He never has any when the son is away.”

“The son makes it?”

“Not he! He never makes anything except a fuss—about himself. Don’t talk about him. I see red whenever I think of him. Would you believe that, although they share a room, he keeps the old man up till nearly two every morning; expects coffee

to be made when he arrives; and the old man to bring him his breakfast in bed whenever he feels like taking it."

"More fool the old man to do it!"

"The fact remains that he does it, and the boy takes it as a matter of course; and although—having no friends here—the father is dependent on his society, he never gives him a moment of it that he can help."

"Tell me about them. I love hearing about new people," said Madge, praising the coffee and laughingly refusing a cigarette.

Jess—reckless to-night of expense—threw on another log and lighted a second cigarette. "There's not much to tell," she said. "After the wife's death Don Quixote and the boy seem to have led a nomad sort of life, living first at hotels—where, when he got tired of circus and theatre-going, Don Q. used to tip the waiters to accompany the boy—and, later, when Carlos began to contract debts which his father was obliged to pay—at second-rate pensions such as this. I wish you could see the room in which the poor old man spends his long, lonely evenings and

writes his novels. He hasn't even a fire, but sits wrapped up in a greatcoat, with a travelling-rug round his knees."

"Are they so poor?" asked Madge.

"The father has a fair income, but he economises because he knows that Carlos will never make a penny. He has studied medicine and law, and now is supposed to be studying art and spends all his time at cinematographs. Then his clothes! He has trunks and trunks full, and whenever they move—which is as soon as a place gets on his nerves—the old man has to pack, and pay for the transit of all this rubbish; and you know what that means in the way of expense."

"There's only one thing for it," said Madge. "You must marry the old man."

Perhaps it was the afterglow of indignation which made Jess's face so rosy as she said, "Will you give us the reversion of your flat and furniture?"

"Certainly, and throw in Annunciatina and Louise."

"Done! But what about the boy? Think how soon the stepmother would 'get on his nerves.'"

"Oh, he'd have to go," said Madge. "It would be his salvation. Thrown on his own resources, he would soon forget his nerves. Nerves at nineteen! What a century it is!"

## CHAPTER X

ON her return to her flat Madge found Annunciatina and Louise in a great state of excitement apropos of a *disgrázia* which had occurred during the afternoon in the Piazza Gesù. Had the Signorina heard about it? The Signorina had heard nothing. For the following five minutes Annunciatina was happy. From her narrative—plentifully punctuated with "*Mamma mia's*" and "*poverina's*," and told with a wealth of gesture and eye-play that would have proved invaluable to a suffragette—Madge gathered that the previous day permission had been asked of the municipality for a funeral procession to take place in honour of a member of the Trades Union. Permission had been granted, provided the procession should not pass the Austrian Embassy—the authorities fearing a hostile demonstration. In order to ensure obedience to this prohibition, troops

had been placed in the Piazza Gesù. Arrived at the Piazza, the leaders of the procession attempted to break through the line of military and enter on the forbidden ground. The order was given to fire, and before the third warning trumpet-blast had sounded, the leaders, arming themselves with stones from a cart which "happened" to be passing, fell upon the soldiers, wounding two or three. The crowd was then fired upon. Three were killed and many wounded. Since then various Socialistic meetings had been held and over a hundred Socialists arrested.

"*Senti pure, Signorina!*" exclaimed Annunciatina, and Madge did listen. Faintly from the direction of the Corso could be heard the sound of tramping feet, of hisses, of piercing cat-like howls.

"*Mamma mia! Mamma mia!*" exclaimed Annunciatina, running to the open window and balancing half her body out of it in a desperate endeavour to see what was happening. "Suppose we should all be murdered in our beds?"

"You'd take an awful lot of murdering, Annunciatina, and I don't quite see how your death would benefit the Socialists."

"Oh, the soul of my mother! Listen to them! They're like a lot of wild beasts."

"It's not musical," said Madge, "but so long as they confine themselves to hissing and hooting we needn't be afraid."

"But, Signorina, think——"

"I'm not going to think. I'm too sleepy. I'm going to bed. If any one wants to murder you, call me, and I'll—lend you Gigi."

It was with an air of ill-disguised triumph that Annunziata, the following morning, marched into Madge's room, breakfast-tray in hand.

"*Guardi!* Signorina, what did I tell you?" she exclaimed, putting down the tray and holding up two square blocks of most unappetising-looking bread.

"A strike? Oh, that's nothing. We haven't had one now for nearly a month."

"Would you like the horrid things toasted—at least one of them? We'd better be economical. To-morrow the soldiers may be otherwise employed than in making bread."

Madge laughed. "What a raven you are! In this beautiful country of yours there is



always a strike or a feast. You are a nation of children, and you must have your little excitements."

"Little excitements, indeed! when the postman says troops are coming in from all over the country and that cannon are being hidden in the Corso!" With this parting shot Annunziata joined Louise in the kitchen and confided to her that, of all people, the English were the coldest-blooded. Whatever you told them, it was impossible to "*fa impressione*."

When, however, an hour later, Madge—equipped less carefully than yesterday—hurried downstairs, bent on taking the tram to the monastery, the generally noisy, crowded Piazza di Spagna *did* impress her. Not a shop open, not a tram, bus, or cab to be seen; hardly a pedestrian—and no women.

"What is the matter? What has happened?" she inquired of a man who was selling newspapers. "A general strike! But surely one can get a cab?"

The man shook his head. "Even the hotel buses mayn't run. Hundreds of *forestieri* have left already, leaving their

luggage to be forwarded. Look, there goes another batch!"

Following the direction of the man's glance, Madge saw a stout, red-faced Englishman panting along, a suit-case in one hand, a portmanteau in the other, followed by a meek-looking little woman with a hat-box—she didn't mean to leave her best bonnet to the mercies of the Socialists—and two small boys, each laden with paper parcels.

"It's outrageous!—I can't think what the authorities are doing to permit such a state of things. In England——"

Madge did not catch any more.

"It's not safe for a lady to be out this morning," said the news-vendor as Madge, after buying some papers, stood wondering what she should do. "There have been some nasty encounters already between the Socialists and the police."

Madge told herself that she had lived too long in Italy to be frightened by a strike. "Jess," she thought, "is sure to go to the Piazza to see the bullet-marks"—the evening papers had announced that the houses opposite the Gesù were riddled with shot—"I might as well go with her."

Arrived, however, at the pension, she found that Jess had been out since nine o'clock.

"What it is to be a 'copy' fiend!" she said to herself, and again she hesitated. But coming to the conclusion that if it were safe for Jess to be out it was safe for her, she turned into the Corso, which looked even more Sunday-like and deserted than the Piazza di Spagna.

"The people must be somewhere—I wonder where they are!" she said to herself, pretending not to notice the glances of curiosity, sometimes of amusement, cast at her by the few male pedestrians. Not until she reached the Piazza Colonna did she see any sign of excitement. In front of the Café Arango groups of men, of all ranks and conditions, stood talking and gesticulating. Here and there a student or a tram-conductor was addressing a crowd of excited listeners, but Madge saw nothing to cause alarm. Noticing, however, the amount of attention she attracted, she thought it best to turn up one of the side streets near the Pantheon and make her way thence to the Piazza Gesù.

"This is why the rest of the town is de-

sented," she thought, when on turning into the Corso Victor Emmanuel she was met by a huge surging crowd. "They're making for the Piazza. I wonder if I dare! I should like to see what is going on."

The man who hesitates in a crowd is swept with it, and before she had made up her mind whether to go on or to turn back, Madge found herself being carried along willy-nilly towards the Piazza. When she arrived opposite the church she began to think that perhaps Annunciatina's fears were not ill-founded. Cannon stood on the church steps and the Piazza itself was surrounded by soldiers. Madge noticed that some disturbance was taking place in the centre of the Piazza, but paying no attention to it she made her way to where a group of people were examining the broken plaster on the houses opposite the church.

"The first volley was evidently fired over the heads of the crowd. Look!" she heard a man exclaim, as he pointed to some marks below a balcony on the first floor. "And it was on that balcony the young girl was standing who was shot."

While Madge was examining the bullet-

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marks she heard a trumpet-blast and noticed a movement among the bystanders, but paying no attention she continued her inspection. There came another trumpet-blast, followed by another movement among the crowd. Then looking round, Madge saw that except for the group in the centre she had the Piazza to herself.

"*Run!*" cried a voice from an open window. "That was the second warning. *After the third, they fire.*"

"And men say that women can't run!" was Madge's first thought, as a moment later she looked back at the now deserted square.

"What happened? Why were they going to fire?" she asked one of her neighbours; and she learned that the group in the centre of the square had been composed of Socialists bent on placing a wreath on the spot where their comrades had fallen the previous day; that the soldiers had confiscated the wreath, and fearing a consequent fracas, had given the three warning trumpet-blasts in order to clear the square.

"They'll content themselves with warnings to-day. There'll be no more firing. They

know better," said the man. "At that moment another warning blast sounded and Madge's informant, in spite of what he had just said, was one of the first to—be warned.

"Oh dear! they're all coming this way, and it's such a narrow street! What *shall* I do?" A second trumpet-blast had sent the crowd surging down the little side street into which Madge had turned for safety. In an instant the owners of the shops and houses flew out, intent on bolting and barring doors and windows.

"Please let me in until they've passed!" Madge implored a woman who was standing at an open window.

The woman laughed and shook her head. "*Forestieri* should stay at home on a day like this," she replied—and disappeared.

A chorus of yells, of hisses, of gruff, deep-throated "*A basso i militari!*" Casting a glance over her shoulder, Madge saw a swaying group of soldiers and civilians, something bright and glittering flashing above the latter's heads.

"Please let me in! I'm so frightened! They're killing each other!" she cried, clutching the arm of a man who was shut-

ting a church door. Before she had finished speaking the door was shut—and locked. Another moment, and she found herself hemmed against a wall, men elbowing her and pushing her on every side. It was impossible to proceed, still more impossible to go back.

"I shall faint! I can't stand this much longer," she was thinking, when suddenly above the hisses and cat-calls she heard a laughing.

"Hold hard there! *I'm not a militario.*"

"Tom, you *darling!*"

"Miss Ockleston, you *idiot!* what in the name of all that's holy are you doing here?"

"Not enjoying myself, that's certain," said Madge, the colour creeping back slowly to her cheeks and lips. "Do you think we'll ever get out?"

"We'll have a shot. Take my arm and hang on like the very——"

Madge took his arm and hung on like the "veriest," and five minutes later they found themselves, hot and panting but safe and sound, in the Piazza Colonna.

"All's well that ends well, but I expect by this time the Captain has been put under

restraint," said Tom, when Madge had explained the plight in which he had found her. "We went to your place this morning, and when he found you were out he indulged in some of the prettiest swear-words I have ever heard. Annunciatina tried to calm him by suggesting that you had gone to the Pincio to be out of the way of the rioters, so he went there on spec, and I came here to see the fun."

"Fun! I don't want any more Socialistic fun," said Madge. "And as for those *squilli!* . . . Every time I hear one of them I feel as though I were shot."

That afternoon Jess called round to say that there would be no sermon, the Pope having issued an order that the Lenten services should be suspended until the strike should be over.

"No instruction and no sermons! What are we to do, Gigi? Life *will* be a blank," sighed Madge; and although she laughed as she spoke, Jess fancied there was more truth in the statement than she would have liked her to believe.

"How long is it likely to last?"

"Who knows? All sorts of rumours are



afloat. They say the English have all left or are leaving; that troops are arriving by every train——”

“If only it would rain!” said Madge.

“I don’t see how that would help.”

Madge laughed. “It would. You can’t think what a calming, rationalising effect a shower of rain has on these Southerners. So long as they can stand about in the sun, plotting and breathing blood and thunder, they’re happy; but to air their views and concoct their plots under a downpour, or even a depressing drizzle—*c’est tout autre chose*. So while Pope and priests are praying for peace and the protection of the saints, Gigi and I are going to pray for—*rain.*”

## CHAPTER XI

WHEN Madge awoke next morning she sat up in bed and listened, then fell back upon the pillows with a glad "They're running! It's all right."

"Of course it's over. . . . Had you visions of it lasting for weeks, and of Louise being reduced to devilling Gigi's legs?" she said, in reply to Annunciatina's news; and perhaps it was the fact of having rolls instead of soldier-manufactured bread that made her breakfast that morning seem so much more appetising than usual.

"'San Michell!' Had she said 'Heaven' she couldn't seem more pleased to go there," thought an impressionable tram-conductor, as he presented Madge with her three-*soldi* ticket. Madge herself wondered why she felt so ridiculously happy.

"Perhaps," she said to herself, "it is the light of faith beginning to dawn upon me;

or, more likely, it is the spring. To-day is decidedly springy."

So the tram-conductor had thought, for the windows were all wide open, and through them came every now and then wafts of violets and narcissi and mimosa from the stacks of flowers which stood at every street corner.

"Spring is lovely everywhere, but in Italy it is heaven," thought Madge, drinking in great gulps of the balmy, flower-scented air; and she wished she dared take an armful of daffodils and hyacinths to enliven the monastery parlour. But she dare not.

"He mightn't approve of them," she thought. "I dare say he considers that awful blue-and-yellow St. Michel more beautiful than all the flowers in the world."

More than one of her neighbours thought that she herself looked like a flower, in her violet dress, her dark hair billowing from under a violet-trimmed toque, and a bunch of Parma violets in her muff.

.. .. .

"Why shouldn't I go? The strike is over and everything is quiet again."

Madge and the Captain were seated outside the Café Arango. The Captain had met Madge in the Corso and had insisted on her having an ice, and while she was eating it he had seized the opportunity to expostulate with her on her folly of the previous day, and on her still greater folly in thinking of attending to-night's service at San Luino.

"The Socialists," he said, "are all anti-clerics; "and it's more than probable some of them will be there, bent on making a row, should the *frate* allude to the strike. During last year's Lenten sermons troops were stationed every evening outside San Luino."

"Yes," said Madge. "But last year's preacher was an anti-Socialist, and was stupid enough to introduce politics into his sermons." Then looking at her watch—"I've five minutes yet. I'm not keen on the Rosary yet, whatever I may be when I'm converted. By the way, when I *am* converted, I shall have to be baptized. Would you like to be my godfather?"

The question was asked with such a charmingly humorous smile that the Captain's "swear-word" died on his lips."

"Madge," he said, leaning over the table and gazing imploringly into her eyes, "you know quite well the relationship I should like to hold to you. It is not that of——"

"Godfather? Always the way!" laughed Madge, unconsciously recoiling from the proximity of the dark, impassioned face. "People never want what they can have, but always what they can't. I may stand in need of a godfather. I shall never stand in need of—the other relation." Her eyes fell before the baffled passion, the dumb pain in his as he said—

"You don't mean that? I thought you liked me."

"I do—immensely."

"Then why——"

"I said 'like.' That's the feeling one should have for one's godfather; but for a husband——"

"The other feeling would come."

Madge shook her head. "It would have to be there, very much there, and in large

quantities, before—— A quarter to six! I'm sorry, Capitano, but I must go!"

The stifled "swear-word" came now, but the Captain paid and made a way for Madge through the crowd. For some seconds neither spoke. Glancing at her companion, Madge was horrified to see how white he was, how drawn and haggard the face which a few minutes ago had been the picture of health and happiness.

"Remember," he said, as they drew near to San Luino, "I don't take your decision as final. I shall never take it as final, until"—a pause, during which the white face became still whiter, the lines about the eyes and mouth more marked—"until you tell me there is another man."

"And until then we shall be friends? *Let us be friends!* I like you so much, and it's not my fault that I can't do more than like you." As she spoke she paused on the church steps and put out her hand. The Capitano bent over it, and Madge, with a little shudder, felt his lips burn through her glove.

"I'll get you a chair and stay near, in case anything should happen," he said; and

seeing that protest would be useless, Madge, with a smiling "Nothing will happen, but stay if you like!"—moved towards her usual place.

As she stood awaiting the Captain's return she noticed among the congregation quite a number of students—recognisable by their caps.

"Oh dear! I hope there will be no disturbance," she said to herself, her face becoming suddenly as white as her companion's; and frightened though she had been by the previous morning's experience, she was a thousand times more frightened now.

"Suppose," she thought, "there *should* be a disturbance? Suppose one of those hot-headed boys should fire at the preacher?" With eyes dilated by fear she found herself, as she passed, peering towards the pockets of the gaily capped youths who stood talking and laughing together, and her heart seemed suddenly to stop beating as she heard one of them say—

"If anything happens, it's the idiot's own fault. Why couldn't he keep his mouth shut a day or two longer?"

"You see it's as I said. Crowds of students here, waiting——"

The Captain stopped, arrested by Madge's pallor, by the strained look in her eyes.

"What's the matter? Has anything happened?"

"It's only the heat after coming out of the open air. I shall be all right in a moment," said Madge, seating herself and taking off her coat; and nothing the other could say would induce her to leave the church.

"If he keeps clear of political subjects they can do nothing," she said, "and should they show any sign of making a disturbance it will be time enough then to go away."

"*Paziénza!*" murmured the Captain, seating himself at her side, and glaring at a neighbouring student who was expressing his admiration of Madge in a too "student-like" manner.

The uneasy feeling to which the Captain had fallen victim since hearing of Madge's friendship with the *frate* disappeared when he noted that the latter never once glanced in her direction, never once glanced in anybody's direction, but addressed himself to



some invisible auditor, a strange, exalted expression in his eyes.

"A blind fanatic, evidently. All the better," he thought; and he wondered how the gentleman had won the good graces of the gods to the extent of being permitted to instruct Madge for an hour every morning and to be favoured with her undivided attention for an hour every afternoon.

Madge's feeling of uneasiness also began to be dissipated as she marked the care with which the *frate* kept clear of dangerous subjects. A dozen times she feared he was about to allude to the strike and the consequent unsettled state of the town; but each time her fear proved groundless, and at length when the interval arrived without anything having happened, she began to breathe freely again and the colour came back to her cheeks.

"He's too scared to give us a loophole. They're always cowards, these priests," she heard one of the students exclaim; and the Captain wondered what had brought such an indignant light to her eyes. "Let's go to San Carlo. There's a monk preaching there. Perhaps he's more of a sport."

Madge watched the two youths wriggle their way through the crowd, and wondered why their idle talk should have caused her such a sharp stab of pain. Could it be cowardice that had caused the *frate* to avoid so carefully the subject of which all his fellow-townsmen were talking—the subject of which, he knew, the minds of his audience must be filled? *Could* it?”

It was a less radiantly happy Madge that wound her way the following morning to San Michel, and so anxious was she to be rid of the sting left by the students' words that no sooner had she greeted the *frate* than she told him how relieved people had been that no disturbance had taken place the previous night at San Luino.

The *frate* laughed his bracing, boyish laugh.

“If I'd had my way,” he said, “I'm afraid the people would not have been relieved. I saw a lot of those good-for-nothing students there and I longed to go for them, but”—regretfully—“we had received orders from the Vatican to say nothing that could give

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a handle to the anti-clerics, so we were obliged to appear meeker than we felt."

"Coward, indeed!" thought Madge, holding up her head for the first time since the cruel little shaft had struck home; and that morning the "conversion" made enormous strides.

## CHAPTER XII

"WHO was the shabby old man on whom you were smiling so sweetly all evening?"

"I introduced you—Señor Montero. Jess and I call him 'Don Quixote.' Any more questions to ask, Signor Capitano?"

Spreading out her skirts, Madge mockingly curtsied to the Captain, then returned to her low chair by the fire. Madge had been seeing off Jess and the Monteros, who, in honour of its being Mid Lent Sunday, had been dining with her; the Captain, Clarice and Tom being the only other guests.

"Jolly old buffer. But, great Cæsar! what clothes!" exclaimed Tom, passing his cigarette-case to the Captain.

"Don Quixote doesn't travel on his clothes," said Madge. "He leaves that to Señor Carlos."

"*He'd* get farther on them than on his brains. I've struck a good many foreign

rotters, but he takes the cake. To hear a man sit up and talk about his *nerves*! Let him try a cold plunge every morning, followed by five minutes with the gloves. *I'd* take him on any day."

"If all men were of the champion boxer variety, life would be very monotonous."

Clarice—an ethereal-looking vision in a white Empire *crêpe de chine*—was seated on the hearth-rug gazing into a box of chocolates with a rapt, meditative expression. She had not liked her first choice and was wondering if *all* the "round ones" were filled with liqueur.

Tom burst out laughing.

"I do like that! I twigged it the moment I saw your heads pressed close together, and heard you whisper in your most confidential tone, '*I* always take glycerophosphates.'"

"You 'twigged' what?" asked Clarice, raising her sylph-like gaze from the chocolates and one of the "square ones" to her lips.

"That you had found a kindred spirit."

Clarice had found that the "square ones" *were* innocent of liqueur, so she smiled as she said—

"He struck me as quite an inoffensive youth, and he can't help being delicate."

"Delicate? Did you see the way he wired into the '*Zuppa Inglese*'?"

Clarice's finely pencilled eyebrows contracted. "Really, Tom, you get more vulgar and unbearable every day. People of a nervous organisation require a greater amount of nourishment than those of a bovine build."

"Is that why you are finishing the chocolates? Here! give the 'bovines' a look-in," and taking the box he handed it round.

"You look glum, Capitano," he said, when it came to the Captain's turn. "Is it because we are eating Miss Ockleston's love-offerings, or because Don Quixote feasted all evening on her smiles? You *were* awfully sweet to him"—casting a laughing glance in Madge's direction—"I was a bit cut up myself."

"I'm always nice to people I like," said Madge, "and I love Don Quixote. I'm going to study Spanish on purpose that I may read his books. Jess says they're delightfully sentimental. He writes poetry too."

"So I should say—from his clothes."

Madge made a comic little *moue*. "They're being very rude to your Uncle Quixote, and he's worth all of them put together—in spite of his clothes," she whispered to Gigi. "Even you were wise enough to see that. Did you notice"—speaking to Tom—"how Gigi made friends with him at once?"

"For the same reason that he always barks at me. I hate psychological dogs. They're most embarrassing. Don't you think so, Capitano?"

The Captain glanced at Gigi who, held up close to Madge's face, was being smothered with kisses."

"I don't care for dogs—psychological or otherwise—except in their own place."

"Hear that, Gigi! It's no use making love to your Uncle Humbert. Unless you're seated on the kitchen fender he'll have nothing to say to you. . . . What! you don't mind? He's a nasty, cross uncle, and you've nothing to say to *him*? . . . That's rude, and your uncle can be quite nice and amiable—when he likes."

She looked from Gigi to the Captain with a smile that would have disarmed an arch-fiend; but the Captain pretended not to see,

and Clarice declaring that it was time to go home, he also rose. As he stood waiting while Madge took Clarice into the adjoining room to get her cloak, he glanced at the titles of two or three books which were lying on the top of a revolving bookcase—*An Answer to Bradlaugh*; Paley's *Evidences of Christianity*; Liddon's *Divinity of Christ*; *What Catholics Believe*.

"That's why I never see her now," he muttered under his breath. "When she isn't at those damned instructions, or those damned sermons, she's reading these books."

"Did you speak?" asked Tom, glancing over his shoulder from the window at which he was standing.

"No," said the Captain, "I swore."

Her guests gone, Madge switched off the lights in the *salotto* and going into her own room, exchanged her gown for a white serge kimono and sat down before the fire to have her usual "five minutes' warm" before going to bed.

"They're in love with each other. I'm so glad!"



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For some time past Madge had had more than a suspicion that the friendship between Jess and Señor Montero was not altogether Platonic. To-night the suspicion had developed into a certainty.

"How becoming it is to be in love!" Madge was thinking of the strange new light which to-night had shone in Jess's eyes—the usually hard, cynical eyes of a woman whose daily lot it is to fight men on their own ground—for bread: the tinge of colour which had lent to the usually sallow cheeks an almost girlish appearance.

Could any one who had seen Madge a month ago have seen her now, as, her face resting on her hands, she gazed into the smouldering fire, such a one would have wondered whether she too had not been brought under love's beautifying influence. Whatever the cause, a transformation—as becoming as it was strange—had taken place in her appearance during the past few weeks. Jess had noted it. So had the Captain. A month ago her beauty had had in it a touch of arrogance. It was the beauty of a goddess taking worship as a right. To-night her beauty was that of a woman—a woman

craving love, not worship; and craving it, not as a right, but as a gift—the most precious of all gifts.

“I should like Jess to be happy,” her thoughts ran on. “She is such a good sort, and has had such a bad time; but what about ways and means?”

For some seconds her face was grave. Señor Montero’s income was only sufficient for himself and the boy. How was he to support a wife? While Jess’s income, being derived exclusively from literary work, would naturally cease when she should become a wife.

Suddenly she broke into a peal of laughter. Of course! Why hadn’t she thought of it before? Clarice! Clarice should marry the boy. He wasn’t really a bad boy. His faults were merely the result of his training. Then Señor Montero would have no scruple in marrying Jess!

So delighted was she at having found such an easy solution of the problem that she felt like clapping her hands. And there was no reason, she told herself, why she shouldn’t clap her hands—on Mid Lent Sunday! Her sole regret was that, her time just now being

so fully occupied, she would not be able to bring the young people together as often as she would have liked.

"I'll get Jess," she thought, "to ask the boy to invite us all to the studio next week. Clarice's love of art is second only to her love of tonics"; and for the following five minutes she amused herself sketching the course of the wooing which should end in a "simple-life" honeymoon and a return to a hygienically perfect house and a host of wedding presents, all of which should take the form of tonics, pills, electric belts, and other health-aiding appliances.

Clarice and Carlos, Señor Montero and Jess, happily married, her thoughts turned to the Captain.

"Poor Capitano!" she said to herself, as she stood unwinding the two thick plaits which, Greek fashion, encircled her head. "Imagine his being jealous of Don Quixote! What an Othello-like husband he would make!"

The blue-black hair—with Jess's coveted "kink" in it—now fell in a rippling shower that all but touched the little white feet thrust into a pair of fantastic Turkish slip-

pers. The face in the glass—the pure oval face with its creamy skin, its Irish eyes, half mocking, half tender, its red, red lips—smiled at her, and she smiled back.

“I don’t wonder,” she said, “that men love you. But you needn’t look so conceited. It is you they love—not *me*—the *real* me.”

The smile grew a trifle wistful, but only for an instant. The next she was murmuring, “I am so happy, so *happy*—that I am *afraid*.” A hundred times during the past few weeks Madge had been conscious of this dual sense of happiness and fear. A hundred times had she sought to diagnose the cause of the strange new happiness which was so transforming her life—the result of the diagnosis being that the cause was to be found in the slow but sure return of her faith—not in God only, but in all her old ideals. She had never yet striven to diagnose the cause of—her fear.

## CHAPTER XIII

"BUT why are you so keen on marrying Carlos?"

"Suppose it should be Clarice I'm keen on marrying? She's my friend."

"Then give her a better——"

"My dear Jess, you're prejudiced. I don't say that Montero Junior is to be compared for an instant with Montero Senior. But we can't all be Don Quixotes."

"The boy's a selfish little beast."

"Because he's been brought up by an unselfish old angel. Given a selfish wife—provided he's in love with her—he'll develop into quite a tolerable member of society. At present all that he's suffering from is an overdose of doting father."

Jess laughed.

"Admitted that the young man is the misunderstood seraph you imply, how is he to keep Clarice if he marries her?"

"Clarice will keep him. She has more than enough to provide tonics for two, and unless she marries Señor Carlos—who from what I saw last night is on the high road to falling desperately in love with her—she will be snapped up by one of the impecunious Italians who are always roaming about like ravening wolves seeking what English heiresses they may devour. And I would not wish my worst enemy a worse fate than that."

"But her people?"

"She hasn't any. Her father died here last spring, and she and Tom are alone in the world."

"You haven't any one in view for Tom?"

"Oh, Tom's quite happy proposing to me once a week. When that amusement begins to pall, it will be time enough to look round for a suitable *parti* for him. But to come back to the studio. Do you think you can manage it?"

"A visit to Carlos's studio would be too hard, I'm afraid, on the chaperones. But in the flat below our pension there is a studio worth seeing, and Don Quixote knows the artist."

"Would he care for an inundation of unknown *forestieri*?"

"He'd love it. Poor old man! he had a stroke two years ago which affected his brain. He's almost childish. All his friend have deserted him, and he's delighted if any one goes to see his pictures. Don Quixote spends an hour with him every day.

"Just the sort of thing he would do."

A faint flush crept into Jess's cheeks. "Yes, it can't be entertaining, but he says he doesn't mind the babbling, or the lapses of memory, though they are trying, but he dreads the moment when he has to say good-bye. The old man sobs and clings to him like a child."

"Doesn't sound a cheerful setting for Love's young dream," said Madge, but Jess waived aside the objection.

"With strangers," she said, "he isn't so sentimental. He gets quite excited, and tells long, rambling stories of his youth, and insists on their seeing his autograph collection, which is very interesting. Besides, Don Quixote will be there, and he will look after the old man."

The above conversation had taken place in the tram, Jess's morning programme including a visit to San Clemente; and that church not being far from San Michel, Madge had offered to accompany her, provided she should go early enough to allow of her being at the monastery by eleven.

"When I am a Catholic I shall often come here to meditate! Isn't it delightfully quiet and old-world?" she exclaimed, as she followed Jess into the primitive-looking, dimly lighted chapel, empty except for themselves and an old peasant woman kneeling at one of the side altars.

Jess noted the "when," but she did not comment upon it. Perhaps she was too much interested in Masaccio's frescoes, in which she was none the less interested on hearing that they were now supposed to be not Masaccio's, but his master's.

"What does it matter?" she said. "It's their age that makes them interesting. Can you imagine their having been here since the fifteenth century?"

"One of those in the lower chapel," said Madge, "dates from the fifth. See, there's the sacristan. Let us get him to take us down."



Following the sacristan down a broad flight of marble steps, they found themselves in a damp, dark, musty-smelling place suggestive of a wine-vault.

"This," said the sacristan, "was in use in the time of the early Christians, and was filled up when the upper chapel was built; and below is a third chapel."

"Oh, let us see that," said Jess. "I never felt so like a rabbit in my life. I shall feel like a mole if we burrow any farther."

"You'd feel uncommonly wet if you went down there," said Madge, pointing to the narrow staircase which led to the lower chapel. "It is always three or four feet deep in water. It was filled up when this chapel was built, and excavated not long ago. Doesn't it make you realise better than anything else how three Romes have arisen one on top of the other—Imperial, Christian and Republican?"

"I can't realise anything, except how damp it is. Let us get to a higher level. I prefer to be a Republican at this time of the year. Perhaps if I'm here in summer I shall become a Christian.

To-day, for some reason, Jess's levity

jarred upon Madge. She herself felt that she could have spent hours here, picturing to herself the crowds of hunted, persecuted Christians who had trodden the very stones that she was treading, who had gazed with faith-laden eyes at the frescoes which filled her only with an intense but impotent longing to believe. This dim, musty, cave-like place seemed so much more in keeping with the idea of Christianity than the modern churches.

"These churches bred saints," she said to herself, as she followed Jess silently up the marble staircase. "The churches of to-day only breed—Cardinals."

The upper church was empty except for the old peasant woman, who was still kneeling in front of the Capella della Passione. Madge noticed that the shoulders under the tattered shawl were heaving, and bending down, she saw tears on the wrinkled, parchment-like face. For some seconds she hesitated. Then seeing that Jess was busy with her Baedeker at the far end of the church, she touched the old woman on the shoulder. "*Poverina*," she said in a tone that would

have sent the Captain into the seventh heaven of delight, "you mustn't cry like that. Tell me what is the matter. Can I do anything to help you?"

The old woman looked up, a dull, dazed expression in her eyes. She had cried so much that she could hardly see, hardly understand.

"Nobody can help me—nobody—except maybe the Madonna," she said, and paying no further attention to Madge she began to sob again—hard, dry sobs which shook her whole body and sent her white hair tumbling about her face.

By this time Madge herself was almost sobbing. "You don't know what I can do," she said. "Perhaps it is the Madonna who has sent me to you."

Again the dim old eyes, with their expression of dazed, hopeless misery, were raised to hers.

"I'm eighty-five," she sobbed, "and I've always paid—always, every week—until now . . . and *now* . . ."

"Hush, don't cry! What is it you can't pay?"

"My rent—the rent of the room I lived

in when my husband was alive—the room in which my children were born. . . . My daughter was ill, and I—I spent the money, and to-morrow——”

Madge opened her purse and poured its contents into the old woman's hand. The woman looked from the mass of gold, silver, and metal to Madge.

“Is it enough?” asked Madge, the woman remaining silent, her eyes almost expressionless with wonder.

“My rent is *due lire*, and here——” Again the eyes returned quickly, feverishly, to the money, as though she feared she had been dreaming; but seeing it still there she caught hold of Madge's hand and smothered it with kisses, murmuring a litany of blessings that would have stretched from the Vatican to the Colosseum.

“She's been breaking her poor old heart for two *lire*—think of it, Jess, two shillings!—and I—oh, come away, or I shall *howl*!” And Madge looked ready to howl as, with quivering lips and a lump like a cannon-ball in her throat, she forcibly drew Jess out of the church.

“That old lady,” said Jess, “will spend all

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her days in tears in hopes of striking another rich Inglese. Next time we come the upper as well as the lower church will be three feet deep in water. By the way, did you leave yourself money for the tram?"

"I didn't," laughed Madge. "You'd better lend me some. I don't suppose the *frate* possesses *due soldi*!"

Jess took the tram home, and Madge continued her way alone. It was a perfect morning, hot without being oppressive; the sky as blue and cloudless as only an Italian sky can be; and as Madge hurried along the "cannon-ball" again rose in her throat at the thought that but for her chance visit to San Clemente a poor old woman would have stumbled along, heart-broken and despairing amid all this beauty, to the wretched hovel in which she had lived for half a century, and out of which she was to be turned on the morrow for the sake of *due lire*. Was it the perfect day, the thrill of spring in her veins, or the thought of the tragedy she had been fortunate enough to avert, that seemed this morning to have filled Madge's cup of happiness to the brim? Madge herself would have found it difficult to explain; but so

intense was this sense of happiness that when, as usual, after a brief greeting, the *frate* knelt down to say his accustomed prayer, he was arrested by a timid "Father, I think *I* should like to pray—*to-day*." Then in reply to a glance of almost incredulous delight—

"I feel so happy . . . so grateful . . . I must thank *someone*. I feel that there must be someone *to* thank!"

For the first time the *frate*—carried beyond himself, beyond all thought of convent rules—clasped both his convert's hands in his.

"Thank *God*, my child!" he said, his voice vibrating with emotion. "Let us both thank God!"



## PART II





## CHAPTER I

"DON'T you think he's rather like Raphael? His eyes, you know. They're so deep, so soulful."

Madge glanced hastily at Jess as though imploring her not to quench this youthful ardour, but the temptation was evidently too great.

"No," said Jess, "he has never struck me as soulful. I should say he was intensely 'bodyful'—full, that is, of his body."

Clarice looked annoyed. Before, however, she had time to reply, Madge chimed in: "I know what you mean. Yes, I *do* think he's rather Raphaelesque. He's so thin and pallid, and has such huge eyes and such long hair. Rather an effeminate type, but one expects an artist to be effeminate."

"I'm so sorry," said Clarice, "that it is not to his studio we are going. Do you think he'd take us there some day?"

"If you tell him you're anxious to see his work, I expect he'd paint something worth seeing: at present he's inclined to be lazy. He requires a spur."

"Do you think anything I could say would act as a spur?" As she put the question a colour, ten times more vivid than that advertised to be produced by her latest tonic, dyed Clarice's cheeks.

Madge saw it and rejoiced. "If I were you," she said, "I should try."

At the entrance to the pension the friends were met by Señor Montero and his son, the latter in a *café-au-lait* suit, a green felt hat, and a red silk tie, knotted loosely under a turn-down collar. The door of the artist's flat was opened by a neat little *cammeriéra*, who led the way at once to the studio, where the artist's sister, a faded-looking woman with a tired expression and a sweet smile, was awaiting them.

"My brother," she said, "will be down in a moment. Perhaps you would like to look at some of the pictures until he comes."

It was a large oak-panelled room. The walls above the panelling were covered with

pictures. Two or three unfinished canvases stood on easels, and many more were stacked against the walls. The most valuable pictures, the sister explained, had been presented to the Government, and were to have a room to themselves in the new Gallery in the Borgese Gardens.

"The 'Regina Marguerita,' the 'Regina Eleanor,' 'the poet Longfellow,' 'Rossini,' 'Scenes in Venice,' painted during the five years my brother studied there." Proudly, yet with a touch of sadness, the little woman pointed out picture after picture, and she was just standing before a splendid Venetian scene when the door opened and a tall, gaunt figure, in a mustard-coloured dressing-gown and a black velvet skull-cap, entered the room. Immediately Señor Montero advanced, and led him forward as though he had been a child.

"These are friends of mine who are anxious to see your pictures," he said.

The old man bowed and smiled a weak senile smile, which turned to a nervous laugh.

"Have you seen this, and this, and this?" he asked, tottering, now towards one, now

towards another, of the pictures and beginning long explanations in which he got hopelessly involved.

"Tell them, *you* tell them!" he would exclaim, turning, half irritably, half imploringly, to his sister; and the hunted look with which he had sought to disentangle the threads of memory would give place to a smile of mingled gratitude and relief as the sister came, always smilingly, always patiently, to the rescue.

"My brother, at the age of thirty, painted by himself," she said, as the old man stopped and stood looking with his usual puzzled expression at the portrait of a remarkably fine-looking man.

Madge glanced instinctively from the picture—the refined face, with its unmistakable stamp of intellectuality, the mass of dark wavy hair, the piercing black eyes—to the poor old tottering figure at her side. The artist seemed to understand her glance.

"Not like now," he muttered; and terrified lest she should have hurt his feelings, Madge perjured herself to the extent of saying—

"Indeed, I can trace the likeness quite well, can't you?"—turning to Señor Mon-

tero, in whose readiness to corroborate the perjury she was not disappointed.

The pictures having been seen and admired, the artist led the way into a small adjoining room, the walls of which were covered with autograph letters from celebrities whose portraits he had painted.

"Show them . . . *English*," he said to his sister, forgetting the names of the people in whom, he knew, the visitors would be interested; and the sister pointed out letters from Longfellow, Herbert Spencer, and several other English and American celebrities.

On returning to the studio the artist stopped before the grand piano which stood in the centre of the room, and asked if any one could play.

"He's passionately fond of music," said the sister. "If either of you two ladies could play some little thing——"

In a moment Madge had pulled off her gloves and, sitting down, began to play—not brilliantly, but quite well enough to please the old man.

"More, more," he kept on repeating, standing beside her beating time upon her

shoulder, and Madge might have been playing still had not the sister gone to the rescue with a smiling reminder that the Signorina was tired, but would come and play to him again some other day.

"How can you bear it? It's worse than death. I know—I nursed some one in the same state for two years," whispered Madge to the sister, the latter dropping behind the others as they passed out of the studio.

"At first I thought I never should be able to bear it; but"—smiling her weary little smile—"one gets used to anything. The only thing I can't bear is the thought that he may outlive me—that he may be left to the care of strangers. Patience and sympathy are all that these cases require, but unfortunately they are qualities that can't be bought."

"He wrote, too?" asked Madge, the sister showing her a book of reminiscences.

The other nodded. "Wrote, played, composed; spoke French, German and English. You can't imagine what he was—and now!"

They had overtaken the rest of the party. The "good-byes" were being said. When it came to Madge's turn the artist would have kissed her hand, but with a little laugh

she withdrew it, and raised his to her lips.

"The hand that has done so much beautiful work is more worthy of being kissed than mine," she said; and taking the sister's, she kissed hers. "You are *doing* your work," she said, "and it also is beautiful. Good-bye. We'll come again if we may, and I'll play to Signor De Mentis until he tells me to stop."

"We might as well go for a turn in the Borgese Gardens. We'll have plenty of time before luncheon," said Madge, as she and her friends returned to the Via Babuino. Every one agreed, and Clarice proposed a visit to the baby wolves which had lately been added to the miniature Zoo.

"Talking of wolves," said Jess, pairing off with Madge and Señor Montero, "what funny things one hears in Rome! I was walking up the steps to the Campidoglio the other day behind a stout, middle-aged lady—who looked like a country parson's wife—and a young girl whom I supposed to be her daughter. 'Yes, do let us go and see the dear bears!' exclaimed the mother. '*Wolves*,' said the girl in a tone of quiet



resignation. 'Ah, yes, wolves, of course—how stupid of me!'—and the cage reached, the good lady stood contemplating the animals with an air of mingled curiosity and compassion. 'Just fancy!' she at length exclaimed, 'those poor creatures having been there all those years—since 1066!' "

"Did the daughter again act monitor?" asked Madge.

"No; she looked round to see if any one had heard—I pretended to be greatly interested in Marcus Aurelius—and then hurried on, with a sarcastic 'They must have been well fed. They've lasted very well.' "

"Perhaps your friend was related to an old lady I came across last St. Stephen's Day in San Stefano," said Madge, explaining to Don Quixote that the walls of that church are covered with frescoes illustrating more realistically than artistically the martyrdom of various Christian saints. "She walked round, making the most inane remarks, with the smuggest, most self-satisfied expression. 'Most instructive, I call it, *most* instructive,' she said. 'See, the date is given of each martyrdom, and under which Emperor it took place.

There is dear St. Ignatius being torn by lions . . . now I always thought he was lead—molten lead. Ah no! here's the lead man. Let me see,' putting up her lorgnettes, 'Saint Erasmus. Of course—under Diocletian and Massimano—really, it's as good as a lesson. If one had only time to study them all!—but'—looking at her watch—'we'll have to leave the rest for another day or—we'll be late for tea!' 'Tortures and Tea'—there's a title for another article, Jess. Have you written 'Timely Hints to Tortured Tourists' yet?"

"Not yet," said Jess; "but I will."

## CHAPTER II

IF March that year had failed to come in like the proverbial lion, it certainly went out like the proverbial lamb. "What does one wear here in August, if muslin is unbearable in April?" asked English people of one another; and one day towards the middle of April, as Madge sat waiting for the *frate* in the monastery parlour, she felt that she really must open the window.

"I don't mind—I like fresh air," said the *frate*, when she confessed what she had done.

"Don't you find those thick habits unbearable in this weather?" Madge asked, as soon as the prayer was over.

The *frate*, who had the clear, pallid skin which never shows heat, laughed as he said, "They spare us the necessity of praying, 'Lord, give us here our purgatory'; though I doubt"—glancing at Madge's muslin

dress, with its transparent vest and sleeves—"whether our habits don't protect us from the sun better than those flimsy things of yours."

"Perhaps," said Madge; "but"—smiling—"I wouldn't exchange." Then quickly, before he had time to begin the instruction—"Now that we are on the subject of clothes, I wish you'd tell me what is your objection to large hats, and how you know that such hats are worn—when you never look at your audience when you preach."

The *frate* glanced at Madge's hat, and having ascertained that it was sufficiently small to exonerate him from the charge of proving personal, he said—

"I don't like anything exaggerated—especially on a woman; and I know that the hats that are worn *are* exaggerated, from various experiences I have had in the streets. You can't imagine how difficult meditation becomes when one has continually to be dodging 'cartwheels'!"

"Satisfy my curiosity on one more point, and I'll be good," Madge said, noting, from the *frate's* manner, that he considered that worldly subjects had already been discussed

too long. Why do you never look at your audience when you preach . . . ?”

“*Now* you may begin—I won’t ask any more questions—until to-morrow,” she said, her curiosity satisfied; but to the first part of the instruction she was not very attentive. She was thinking how surprised the old monk who had acted monitor in oratory to the *frate* would be could he know that his advice to his pupil—never to look at his audience, but always to imagine when preaching that he had for audience the Blessed Virgin—had resulted in making at least one convert to his faith.

The instruction that morning was on confession. Madge having some days ago expressed the wish to become a Catholic, it had been decided that she should be baptized and make her first confession on Holy Saturday, and receive her first Communion on Easter Sunday. Madge had already had explained to her the origin and uses of Confession—she had also heard the Catholic answer to the charge of its abuses—but to-day the instruction dealt with “first and general” confessions.

“You mean,” she said—the *frate* having

explained that a "first" must be a "general" confession—"that on Saturday I shall have to confess every sin I have ever committed?"

"Every mortal sin."

"And to whom must the confession be made?"

The *frate* marked the crimson wave which flooded Madge's cheeks as she put the question, and misinterpreting its origin, he said—

"It can be made to me, or to any one to whom you choose to make it. Many people prefer to make a general confession to a stranger."

Madge's cheeks grew hotter still. "I have," she said, "nothing to confess of which I am ashamed."

"*Beata Lei!* I wish I could say the same."

Hardly had Madge spoken than she remembered that she *had* something to confess of which she was ashamed. Something it would be almost impossible to confess to the *frate*. Yet should she, after what she had said, choose another confessor, he would naturally draw his own conclusion.

"Why should I care what conclusions he draws? When Easter is over I shall never

see him again." Vainly she asked herself the question. Admitted that there was no reason why she should care, the fact remained—she did care.

The following day was Wednesday in Holy Week, and Madge insisted on Jess going with her in the afternoon to Tenebræ at St. Peter's. Jess had made a feeble resistance.

"They say it's an awfully long, tedious service. Suppose I should go to sleep, or be frightened when the lights are put out?" she objected, when the question was raised.

"It's your duty as a journalist to see these things," Madge maintained; then, in a pleading voice—"And if you do come, please don't make fun of the service. It may seem ridiculous to one who doesn't understand. But all these things are so real to me—*now*."

Jess glanced at the radiant face, with its wonderfully softened expression. Was it the fact of her conversion that had wrought the change? Even now she could not realise that Madge was "converted." It had all

been so unexpected, so sudden—too sudden, she often told herself, a vague uneasiness at her heart.

The origin of her uneasiness she would have found it difficult to explain. Was it that she feared there had been too much of the emotional, the personal element in her friend's conversion, and that, the *frate's* influence withdrawn, the excitement of the past few weeks over, Madge would find that it had been her heart, not her intellect, that had succumbed to Catholicism. Or did her foreboding assume a still darker form? She decided not to analyse it. Madge was happy. That was the great thing. Of the origin of her happiness she determined not to think.

“The *frate* has given me tickets for the enclosure, so you won't need *that*,” exclaimed Madge, as punctually at three o'clock Jess appeared, camp-stool in hand.

“Just as well,” said Jess; “the padrona of the pension lent it to me, and I'm not at all sure how it might behave when sat upon. It would be awful to come a—— Oh, I forgot”—arrested by Madge's warning



glance—"the service is to be taken *au grand sérieux*."

When they arrived they found that the service had already begun. The body of the church looked more like a market-place than anything else. People of every class and nationality, walking up and down, sitting on camp-stools, or perched upon altar rails, pillar pedestals, or the seats of confessionals, all talking, all laughing, all oblivious of the ceremony that was going on and heedless of its signification. At the extreme end of the church, within a railed-in space, sat the priests and cardinals. In the middle of the enclosure stood a huge triangular candelabrum in which burned sixteen candles. Facing this enclosure was another, wherein sat three or four hundred ticket-holders, and behind them stood a gaping, chattering crowd.

"If you'll explain the candles, I won't trouble you any more," said Jess, when she and Madge had been shown to their places; and having heard that the candles were symbolical of the twelve apostles and the three Maries, all of whom had deserted Christ in the hour of His passion, and that

the solitary one at the top represented Christ Himself, she made herself as comfortable as the backless bench permitted and was preparing for a doze when an acolyte appeared with an extinguisher, and with an air of great solemnity put out one of the candles.

"What's that for?" Jess's question was asked before she remembered her promise; but Madge, who was following the service out of a brand-new *Ufficio della Settimana Santa*, explained that at the conclusion of each psalm one of the candles was extinguished, and that at the end of the service the whole church would be in darkness.

"You can read the psalms with me if you like," she added, offering Jess the book; but Jess shook her head. At that moment a boy's voice, sweet and clear as a bell, cleaved the air.

"How heavenly!" said Jess. "Why can't they let him sing the whole service?" And not until the last throbbing note had trembled into silence did she settle herself to her doze with a whispered "Wake me when he sings again!"

Although Madge did not doze, she could not keep her attention from wandering every

now and then from the scene before her to the scene that must have been enacted on this day centuries ago in the original St. Peter's. With what reverence, with what aching hearts and blinding tears, the congregations of those days must have assisted at this the saddest of all the Church ceremonies!

"Suppose," she thought, "they could have foreseen the Tenebræ of the twentieth century; the clergy nodding and yawning in their stalls, the privileged seats bought by heretics—some attracted by the 'mummery,' others by the music—the church itself turned into a promenade where Catholics and heretics vie with each other as to who can be the more noisy, the more irreverent . . .!"

. . . . .

"Jess!"

Jess opened her eyes, and at the same instant a voice, weird and unearthly, yet unspeakably beautiful, intoned the opening lines of the *Miserere*.

Awed in spite of itself into silence, the crowd at the back of the church pressed forward and listened as with one ear. The sudden hush, the intentness with which each member of the huge crowd hung upon each

plaintive, wailing note, had in it a touch of grandeur—of grandeur mingled with sadness. It seemed as though a whole world were drinking in the dirge of its dying God.

The spell was soon broken. Hardly had the last note died into silence than the crowd—as though ashamed of its momentary emotion—again began to talk, to laugh, to make inane and blasphemous remarks.

“Don’t go yet! the fun’s just going to begin. They hide the last candle under the altar, make a great hullabaloo to represent an earthquake, bring back the candle to represent the resurrection, and then the circus is over. I saw the whole blooming show last year.”

Madge looked round at the speaker, but, blind to the indignation in her eyes, he pulled his companion’s sleeve as he murmured, “Great Scot! What a butel!”

It had been broad daylight when the service began, but by the time the last candle was extinguished the church was wrapped in darkness.

“Buck up, old man!” whispered Madge’s admirer to his friend; “now for the earth-

quake. . . . Bah!"—as one of the deacons rattled a wooden rattle—"I could make a better show than that myself."

When she had heard of the gradual extinguishing of the lights, of the simulated earthquake, of the bringing back of the solitary candle, whose feeble gleam should be the sole light in the vast shadow-haunted building, Madge had imagined that she would be very much impressed.

"It's impossible to be impressed, to be anything but disgusted and irritated, when everything is so ridiculed, so vulgarised. I can't think why they let these people in," she sighed, as with a scathing glance at her admirer she followed Jess, who was bent on seeing the relics which were to be exposed before the giving of the papal benediction.

By this time the electric lights had been switched on again, and all the attention was concentrated on a small, brilliantly illuminated and crimson-draped balcony at the right-hand side of the church. A bell rang. A door at the back of the balcony opened, and Cardinal Rampolla appeared, followed by two or three attendants. One of these handed to the Cardinal what looked like an

old-fashioned fire-screen. Taking this in both hands, the Cardinal advanced to the front of the balcony and held up the relic to the people's view, passing from one end of the balcony to the other that all might see.

"St. Veronica's veil; but it might be anything, for all we can see of it," Jess heard some one near her exclaim. The attendant priest took the veil and handed to the Cardinal the relic of the true Cross, then the spear with which Christ's side was pierced. When these had been exposed in the same manner, the papal benediction was given, and the crowd began to disperse.

Jess had noticed how meekly Madge had knelt during the above ceremony, how her eyes had kindled as she gazed at each of the relics, how reverently she crossed herself on receiving the benediction.

"Do you really believe it all? I can hardly realise that you do, even yet," she said, as Madge rose from her knees and stood waiting for the crowd to disperse before attempting to leave the church.

Madge smiled,

"Of course I believe it all—a thousand times more than most of these," glancing at her still kneeling neighbours. "A convert, you know, is proverbially more Catholic than the Pope."

### CHAPTER III

HER instruction over, Madge the following morning—Maundy Thursday—visited the “sepulchres” in the different churches, that at San Silvestro—formed almost entirely of white flowers sent by the Queen—pleasing her most. For nearly an hour she “watched,” and as she knelt there—guarding the temporary resting-place of her newly found God—her heart was very full. All these Lenten ceremonies, which before had seemed to her so meaningless, so childish, now struck her as full of beauty; and as she realised that the Christ—hidden for three days behind the banks of flowers, as, centuries ago, He had been hidden for three days within the tomb—would at dawn on Easter Day enter into her heart, become one with her, and raise her soul from its long sleep, as on that far-off Easter Day He had raised His own body from the sleep of



death, she trembled and was afraid. Was she sufficiently prepared? Was her faith in this the most stupendous of all miracles sufficiently firm? Tremulously but resolutely she put aside the fear which, the *frate* had told her, was a perfectly natural one, but one to be combated; and with bowed head and smiling lips she repeated the prayer of the centurion: "Lord, I believe—help Thou my unbelief."

That evening Madge, Jess, Clarice, and the Monteros went to Tenebræ at St. John Lateran, where the singing is supposed to be finer even than at St. Peter's. The singing may have been better, but the behaviour of the congregation was, if possible, worse.

"Isn't it scandalous? And, if you notice, it's the Italians, not the strangers, who do most of the talking and laughing," exclaimed Señor Montero, as they came away; and apropos of Clarice's ecstasies over the tenor's voice, he told her that, some years ago, the tenor who sang the Lenten solos had created such a *furore* that on leaving the church on the evening of Maundy

Thursday he had been fatally shot by a jealous rival.

"I thought jealousy among singers was confined to prima donnas," said Jess; while Clarice hoped that the present tenor, to whom she had lost her heart, would have sufficient sense to go home by back streets.

"You're awfully good-natured, Jess; but it *will* be useful as 'copy,' won't it? I don't want to victimise you."

It was Good Friday morning, and Jess was hanging on to a strap in the tram bound for Santa Croce. Madge—who never failed to find some one ready to yield her his place—was seated beside her.

"Don't have any scruples on my account," laughed Jess. "I love a crowd, whether it's a cross-kissing or a brick-throwing crowd. Humanity is always interesting—especially in bulk."

After leaving the tram at San Giovanni there was a long, dusty, shadowless road to be negotiated before reaching Santa Croce. When they arrived, three priests were singing the Story of the Passion; the tenor taking the part of Christ, the baritone that

of Pontius Pilate, and the bass that of Judas, the choir singing the utterances of the populace. This over, a crucifix was laid on the altar steps and a procession of priests, monks, nuns, and laity made their way up the central nave, prostrated before the crucifix, kissed the crossed feet of the "dead" Christ, and passed on.

"Of course I'm going to kiss It—that's what I came for," said Madge, as Jess protested against this public act of faith with a warning "Think of the microbes!"

From Santa Croce the friends made their way to the neighbouring church of the Scala Santa.

"I'm coming up with you. I'm contemplating writing an article on Holy Week in Rome, and I want to be able to speak from experience," said Jess. "But what am I to do with my sunshade? I can't take it up with me."

"Indeed you can," Madge assured her. "Last Good Friday I was here—simply as a sight-seer—and I saw people burdened with babies, baskets, and much less portable things than a sunshade."

"It isn't a graceful mode of progression, but I don't see why it should be regarded as a penance," remarked Jess, as a moment later she and Madge stood at the foot of the staircase awaiting their turn to ascend.

The mode of progression certainly was not graceful. To stand upright is forbidden, and the steps being unusually shallow and broad, the only mode of ascent is an undignified scramble or a still more undignified nursery crawl. A few monks and nuns, whom practice had evidently made perfect, managed to achieve the difficult feat more gracefully than their neighbours; but Jess, as she alternately stumbled, scrambled and crawled, told herself that no one with a shred of self-respect would ever be seen trying to ascend the sacred stairs. For the first few moments she was struck by nothing but the indignity of the thing; but gradually, from the constant scraping of the bare boards—which enclose the original marble steps—her knees began to feel uncommonly sore. What, she wondered, must Madge's feel like, covered as they were by the flimsiest of muslin skirts! Congratulating herself on her thick serge and business-like stockings, she crawled four

or five steps higher. By that time the agony was excruciating.

"I can't stand any more of this. I'm going back," she said to herself; and she was about to rise when the brown, wrinkled hand of a neighbouring peasant was laid on her shoulder, and an indignant voice exclaimed—

*"E vietato stare in piedi!"*

A chorus of indignant comments warning Jess that discretion might be the better part of valour, she set her teeth and struggled on, her frame of mind not rendered any more amiable by a would-be defender's contemptuous *"Paziénza! Sono forestieri."*

"Madge, I'm skinning! Do go slowly. I shall have to have a double fee for this article!" she whispered; but Madge—who long ago had "skinned"—paid no attention. The novel experience of suffering—even such trivial suffering as this—for her new-born faith was so sweet that she would willingly have prolonged the agony had it been possible.

"I think we deserve a little refreshment after that," said Jess, as they left the church; and she was relieved to hear that Annuncia-

tina had promised to have luncheon ready at a quarter to twelve, the "Three Hours' " service at the Gesù beginning at one o'clock.

When Madge and Jess entered the Gesù at ten minutes to one, they found the church already full and had some difficulty in getting chairs. The windows were all shrouded, the only light being that yielded by two candles which flanked a life-size representation of the Crucifixion which stood in front of the altar. The congregation, as usual, was composed almost exclusively of the lower classes, except for an occasional sight-seer.

"Do the upper classes never go to church?" asked Jess.

"When they do," said Madge, "they have private tribunes."

"I don't blame them," thought Jess, edging away from a man who looked as though he might have posed for Pears's celebrated advertisement.

As the clock struck one a priest—clad in a simple black soutan—appeared and mounted the green baize-covered platform, on which stood a chair, a table, and the inevitable glass of water. He was followed by a shy-looking

deacon, who stood beside the platform, and whose duty it was to read a short comment on the utterance on which the other was to preach. The priest said a prayer, in which the congregation joined, then sat down while the deacon read his homily on Christ's first utterance from the Cross—"Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." Then he rose and began his sermon.

He preached well. Though lacking the personal magnetism which distinguished the *frate's* preaching, there was in his voice, in his delivery, a dramatic touch admirably suited to his subject and to the occasion. The whole scene was a trifle theatrical; the darkened church, the figure of the Christ standing out, white and corpse-like, against the black draperies of the altar; the huge crowd hanging, hushed and awestricken, upon the words of its dying God.

"This is fine! it quite retrieves the skinning," whispered Jess as, at the end of the first discourse, the priest sat down; and from somewhere up above burst a strain of exquisite music; the touching if somewhat dramatic eloquence of the preacher, the beauty of the singing, constituting an in-

tellectual treat as enjoyable as it was unexpected. Apart from the sermon and the singing, Jess had found another source of interest. This was an old peasant woman to whom the dramatic touch in the preacher's delivery evidently added only another charm. The way the wizened old face lighted up when he made a happy hit, the scornful curl of the withered lips as he anathematised the enemies of Christ, the proud uplifting of the bowed grey head as he proclaimed his preference to stand with Christ and all the world against him to standing against Christ and all the world at his feet, the pitiful quivering of the toothless mouth, the tears that trickled down the sunken cheeks as she listened to the saddest cry that has ever wrung the human heart, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"—Jess noted them all, and her keen face grew thoughtful.

"When one thinks what Catholicism is to such as she, one can forgive it everything," she said to herself; and she resolved that, whenever she felt bitter against the creed that for centuries has proved the most insurmountable of all obstacles to human progress, she would remember the face of



the old peasant woman during the Three Hours' service at the Gesù.

After tea Madge and Jess hurried to San Luino, where the *frate* was to preach on the Passion—his last sermon but one. Madge had had no instruction that morning, and already—occupied and interested though she had been—she had been conscious every now and then of a restlessness, a sense of something lacking, which puzzled, while it annoyed her. Only at six o'clock, as she sat watching the late comers literally fighting their way into the already crowded church, did this restless feeling desert her, did she realise that the blank, of which all day she had been conscious, was about to be filled.

"I must get accustomed to living without instructions and sermons," she told herself, with a rather uneasy little smile; for, though the *frate* had promised to continue his instructions for some days longer, Lent over, the sermons would naturally cease.

The sermon that night was on the Crucifixion, and never had the *frate* been more eloquent, never had he so carried his audience with him; many—the women espe-

cially—crying copiously and audibly. Madge did not cry. She was thinking how white and emaciated the preacher looked; and marking how, in proportion as his emotion increased, his physical strength seemed to grow more and more exhausted; until once, on reaching the climax of an unusually long peroration, she feared he was going to faint.

“I’m glad Lent is over,” she said to herself. “He is overworked and probably underfed. He’s just the sort of man to go to extremes in fasting as in everything else.”

## CHAPTER IV

FOUR o'clock the following afternoon saw Madge again seated in San Luino, an open prayer-book on her knee. She had been baptized and received into the Church that morning. The ceremony had been quite private, only Jess and Don Quixote having been present. On returning to her flat Madge had been surprised to find a priest in possession, and still more surprised to learn that he was there on Annunciatina's invitation. It was customary, it seemed, among Catholics to have the house and food blessed by the parochial priest on Holy Saturday; and Annunciatina, having met the priest as he returned from blessing the flat above, and thinking that now her Signorina was a Catholic she would like a Paschal blessing, had asked him to come in and await Madge's return.

Madge's faith in the efficacy of a blessing

invoked by such an "unblessed"-looking man was not great, but not wishing to appear rude, she thanked Annunziata for her thoughtfulness, then turning to the priest, said—

"You are quite at liberty to bless the flat; but I've been so busy during the past few days, I don't believe there is any food to *be* blessed—unless——"

"*Macché!* Signorina!" exclaimed Annunziata, indignant at such an aspersion on the commissariat. "*Quardi pure!*" and she led the way to the kitchen, where on the table presided over by Louise in her Sunday best, lay a pair of chickens, a fore-quarter of lamb; a dish of peas and new potatoes, garnished with sprays of mint; and a basket of eggs; to say nothing of rolls and butter, and fruit.

"I'm glad I'm dining with you to-morrow," whispered Jess; while the priest, who was armed with a vessel full of holy water and a sprinkler, sprinkled the food and muttered over it something which may have been a prayer, but which—judging from his expression—seemed more like a regret that he too was not to be a partaker of the morrow's feast.

The food blessed, the priest performed

the same ceremony on the threshold of each room, and the glance he cast round Madge's bedroom made her cheeks grow hot. "Men, not angels, ministers of the gospel"—the title of one of Newman's sermons—recurred to her, and she felt it would recur to her daily, as she should be brought more and more in contact with the Italian clergy.

"I suppose they *can't* be angels," she said to herself, turning away so as not to meet the priest's sleepy, sensuous glance; "but they might at least be less repulsive men."

"It's customary to give an 'offering' as well as the eggs," Annunciatina—who brought up the rear of the procession armed with a basket of eggs—whispered to Madge, who took a note from her purse, and, shuddering at the thought of touching the priest's hands, slipped it into the basket.

"I'm very much obliged to you," she said, bowing rather stiffly in reply to the priest's impressive "*Arriverederci*"; but if he were offended at her lack of cordiality he more than forgave her when he saw the note.

The prayer-book on Madge's knee lay open at a page entitled "Aid to the Ex-

amination of Conscience." She did not think she had forgotten anything, but to make sure she let her eyes wander over two or three of the questions in the "Aid." Suddenly she closed the book. Could it be true, she asked herself, the accusation she had heard brought against Catholic confessors—that in order to "help" their penitents they suggested, even to mere children, sins of whose existence they would otherwise have remained ignorant? Suppose the *frate* should thus attempt to "help" her? She shuddered at the thought, but the following instant she smiled.

"An infant would be safe with him," she said to herself. "He's not of the 'helpful' kind"; and she wondered what she would be feeling now had she been obliged to confess to the gentleman who had blessed her flat. Seeing that it would be her turn next, she knelt down, covered her face with her hands, and asked herself for the hundredth time how she was to confess the only sin that she was really ashamed to confess.

"Once confessed, I shall trouble myself no more about it. It will cease to make me

hot and uncomfortable every time I think of it. After all, it was committed against him, and although, of course, he will not know that, if he forgives it I shall feel it really is forgiven."

"Signorina!"

Madge looked up, to see that her turn had come, and with very different feelings from those with which, a month ago, she had entered the confessional, she rose and moved to the vacant place. How annoyed she had then been, and how relieved she now was, that it was not the *frate's* custom to look at his penitents! What self-confidence she gained from the sight of the bowed head, the carefully averted face! With trembling hands she put aside her veil and placed her lips as near as possible to the grating.

"You must tell me, father," she said, "if I make any mistakes. This is my first confession."

"It is you, my child?"

The words were spoken in his usual low, level tones. There was no hint of curiosity in them, no suspicion that the confession he was about to hear had any particular interest for him. Madge was glad. Self-conscious-

ness on his part would have made her self-conscious. As it was, she said what she had to say with the simplicity, the unself-consciousness, of a child. Madge had very little to confess. As a child, as a school-girl, she had always been wilful and what her superiors called "insubordinate," and she confessed this frankly and expressed her sorrow; not so much for the pranks she had played—even now she could not altogether regret *them*—as for the pain she must often have caused those placed in authority over her. Of the ordinary petty feminine failings, Madge was unusually free. In fact, her list of sins came so quickly, so abruptly, to an end that the *frate*—mistaking the reason of the pause which followed—suggested: "Vanity, my child?"

Madge was thinking that the time had come to confess *the* sin; but in reply to the *frate's* inquiry she said—

"I don't think I'm vain. I know I'm good-looking. And I'm glad; I should hate to be ugly. But I should derive just as much pleasure from a friend's good looks as I do from my own."

"Dress, my child? Do you spend too



much money, too much thought, on the adornment of your body?"

Madge hesitated for a moment. She *did* spend a good deal of thought and money on her clothes; but she had never considered such expenditure sinful.

"I like pretty clothes," she said, "as I like all pretty things; and I like to be well dressed; but I don't dress to attract attention—I dress to please myself." Again she paused.

"I must tell him now," she was thinking; and again the *frate*, imagining that she was in need of help, suggested—

"Truth, my child—have you ever sinned against truth?"

"I wish he'd leave me alone," thought Madge, forced again to postpone the fatal moment; but she answered, with her former simplicity—

"Perhaps, when I was a child, but I don't think so. Children lie because they are afraid. I was never afraid."

"And since you ceased to be a child?"

"He's determined I shall confess myself a liar. Does he consider lying a feminine prerogative?" and Madge's tone was a trifle

impatient as she said, "I've told the usual social lies that one has to tell occasionally, in self-defence, or to spare people's feelings; but I have never lied in order to injure another or to shield myself."

Here there was so long a pause that Madge, terrified lest the suggestions should assume a less innocent form, determined to take the fatal plunge.

"Father," she stammered, "there's one sin I have to confess of which I am ashamed."

"Are you not ashamed, my child, of all your sins?"

"I am—if I must be. But of this one I can't *help* being ashamed. I was ashamed of it before I became a Catholic."

Was it imagination on Madge's part, or did the *frate's* bowed head sink a trifle lower? Was his carefully averted face still more averted, as though he feared what was to follow?

"It's about a man, father."

She paused so long that the *frate's* fears—had he entertained such fears—must surely have been augmented.

"Courage, my child," he said. "You are

confessing, not to man, but to God—the God who said ‘Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.’ ”

Again Madge’s imagination may have been at fault; but she fancied that in the quiet, level tones she detected a touch of disappointment, a shade of coldness.

“I must get it out. He may think it something worse than it is. What does it matter what he thinks?” The thoughts chased each other through her brain, and her voice was not quite steady as she said—

“This man, father, annoyed me. I had always been accustomed to admiration—I took it as a matter of course. The man of whom I speak not only did not admire me, he would not even look at me—though he had every opportunity——”

“Yes, my child? And you——”

“I determined that he *should* look at me . . . that he *should* admire me; and in order to gain my end, if I did not actually tell—I acted a lie.”

Madge paused; and the *frate*, wishful, perhaps, to give her time to gain courage to continue her story, said—

"An acted, is worse, my child, than a deliberate lie."

"I know, father. That is what makes me so ashamed. I feel I can't look him in the face until——"

"You succeeded, then, in conquering his indifference?"

"No. He's still indifferent. And I'm glad."

"I thought you said, my child, that his indifference annoyed you?"

"It annoyed me that he wouldn't look at me; but when he did, and I got to know him, I did not mind whether he admired me or not."

"Perhaps it struck you as more novel not to be admired?"

"Perhaps—or perhaps it was that I was tired of being cared for in that way, that I wished him to like me for myself. I don't know."

Had the *frate's* face been visible a puzzled look must have been seen on it as he said—

"Is that all, my child?"

The puzzled look gave way to one of relief, and that again to one of surprise—

(Why, he wondered, *should* he feel relieved?)—as Madge replied, “That, father, is all.”

“It’s over! He knows the worst now, and he’s going to absolve me!”

Madge bowed her head, and never did penitent listen more eagerly, more gratefully, than did she to the soothing “*Absolve te!* Go in peace, my child. Thy sins are forgiven thee!”

## CHAPTER V

"THE last sermon! Jess, what shall I do when there are no more sermons?"

Jess had had tea ready for Madge when she returned from confession, and they were now on their way back to San Luino for the sermon. Jess herself had often wondered, of late, by means of what new "fad" Madge would kill time once this religious "fad" should come to its natural conclusion; but she answered, in her usual matter-of-fact tone—

"You lived for a good many years without sermons. I suppose you'll do the same again."

Madge to-night looked radiant—so radiant that Jess thought it a pity the beauty specialists did not recommend "confession" as a complexion restorer.

"Did I live before Lent began?" she said, with one of her enigmatical smiles. "I take your word for it, but I feel as though I had never been truly alive until the last month.

Do I look different?"—turning laughingly to Jess. "I can't imagine how one can feel as different as I do, yet look the same."

"You've always struck me as looking particularly alive—even before Lent began," said Jess. Then after a rapid glance at the other's face—"You look happier. But when I first saw you, you were in one of your depressed moods. The furnishing fad had ceased to interest, and the *frate* fad had not begun."

Madge laughed.

"Imagine comparing the interest brought into my life by the *frate* to the interest one takes in colour schemes!"

"Both are time-killers. To-morrow you'll have to think of another to replace them."

"Not to-morrow," said Madge, with the air of one determined to enjoy the present and let the future look to itself. "The *frate* says we must continue the instructions for another week; and who knows that, when the week is over, I may not contemplate entering a convent—and require advice as to my vocation?"

Madge's light-heartedness on the eve of parting with the *frate* had succeeded in

allaying a fear which latterly had caused Jess no small uneasiness; a fear which—on hearing of the postponement of the parting—rose again from its grave and faced her with the old query—"Does she know that she's in love with him? What will happen when she does know?"

"Last times" are always more or less sad, but as Madge sat for the last time in the place where, during the past six weeks, she had spent so many happy hours, and realised that those hours were drawing swiftly to a close, her throat contracted and a mist rose before her eyes.

"I suppose it is because I shall never hear it again!" she thought, as at the clang of the bell announcing the preacher's approaching arrival, her heart began to throb, throb, until, as the *frate* mounted the pulpit and gazed around him with his usual dreamy, unseeing eyes, it thumped so madly that she could hardly breathe.

To-night—her confession in mind—she rejoiced that the *frate's* expression *was* so dreamy, so unseeing; but having heard that the papal benediction was always given at



the end of the Lenten mission, she could not help wondering whether curiosity would not induce him to embrace that opportunity of gazing, face to face, at his audience for the first time—and the last.

The sermon that night was on the Resurrection, and the *frate* was so unusually eloquent that even Jess was stirred to the point of forgetting his accent and of thinking that perhaps it was as well for herself as for Madge that Lent was so nearly over.

"There is certainly," she said to herself, "a wonderful fascination about the man; and if his fascination appeals to me, unimaginative and prosaic as I am, how much more strongly must it appeal to an idealist like Madge!"

As the thought passed through her mind instinctively her eyes wandered to her friend, who—motionless as though fearing by the slightest movement to lose one of the preacher's words—sat gazing at the *frate* with eager, parted lips, in her eyes an expression which made Jess mutter to herself—

"If that's not the real thing I've never seen it. I'm a psychological novelist and

I ought to know." And once more the question rose up and filled her with misgiving—"How is it she doesn't know? What will happen when she does?"

The interval was over. The *frate* had made the announcements for the coming week and was about to resume his sermon when an acolyte appeared, mounted the pulpit steps, and handed him a slip of paper. The *frate* glanced at the paper, whispered something to the boy, then turned and faced his audience.

"I have just received an order," he said, "to leave Rome in an hour. We monks, you know"—smiling as he seemed to "sense" the astonishment of his listeners—"must hold ourselves in readiness to be sent at a moment's notice to the other end of the world. I am not going that far—to-night—but I must go quickly. One word I must say before I give you the papal benediction—a word of gratitude for the fidelity, the patience, with which you have listened to me during the past six weeks. If anything I have said has proved helpful to you, it is God you must thank, not me, who am but

His instrument. If, however"—smiling again—"you wish to prove your gratitude to the instrument, pray for the success of the mission upon which I am bound. And now, dear friends—I feel that, after speaking and listening to each other during all these weeks, we must be friends—I will say 'good-bye,' and God bless you! If it should be God's will that on earth we may never meet again, may we all meet in heaven!"

No sooner had the *frate* ceased speaking than Jess glanced at Madge. Every vestige of colour had left her face—even her lips were white; while in her eyes was the wide, startled expression of one suddenly awaked from a dream.

As the *frate* took from its socket the crucifix which stood beside him, the congregation rose and knelt down. Madge also rose, but she did not kneel down. She stood erect, a strange, compelling expression on her face, her hand leaning heavily—as though for support—on the back of her chair.

"He shall *not* leave me like this: without a word, without a look! He *shall* look at me *once*—for the last time." This was the thought which nerved Madge, sick and

faint as she felt, to stand while all around her knelt, awaiting with bowed heads and folded hands the papal benediction. What was the papal benediction to *her*, in comparison with a last look, a last farewell, from the eyes she loved, the eyes she might never see again? High above the sea of bowed heads the *frate* held the figure of the crucified Christ; but it was at that figure, not at his audience, he looked, as in clear, ringing tones he pronounced the papal benediction.

Her neighbours took Madge for a mad-woman as, white and trembling, with head erect, she stood gazing, not at the Christ but at the *frate*, her eyes fixed on his with an expression terrifying in its intensity. "Look at me once! Just one look—that I may have something to remember, something to assure me that the last six weeks have not been a dream! . . . You have saved my soul. . . . Would you kill my body?" this expression seemed to say.

The plea was in vain. The blessing given, with hands that trembled—Jess noted it and attributed it to excitement—the *frate* re-

placed the crucifix in its socket, descended the pulpit steps—and disappeared.

"She is ill, not mad," said a woman to her neighbour, as without a word, without a cry, the tall white figure, so erect the previous moment, swayed and slipped quietly to the ground; while Jess, who hurried forward, whispered to herself—

*"She knows!"*

The night was so oppressive, so warm and still, that the windows of Madge's bedroom stood wide open. There was not a sound except the ticking of the clock, the occasional call of a news-vendor, the crackling of the wood fire. Madge lay on the bed just as she had been placed on being carried home from church. She lay so still, her face was so absolutely colourless, that every now and then Jess—fearing she had relapsed again into unconsciousness—would bend over her, and in response to her whispered "Madge!" the closed eyes would slowly open, the look in them always making Jess wish she had left her alone.

At eight o'clock Annunciatina knocked at the door to say that dinner was ready, but in

reply to Jess's offer to bring her something, Madge shook her head.

"You go, Jess—please," she whispered; and thinking a refusal would worry her, Jess went. On her return Madge was lying just as she had left her, and when as before she bent over the bed, the eyes that slowly opened and gazed into hers had the same dumb, stricken look.

"If only she would *speak!*" she thought, taking the cold, limp hand and trying to caress it—caresses did not come easily to Jess—but the white, set lips looked as though they would never speak again.

It had struck the quarter before midnight, and Jess was standing by the open window. The last news-vendor had disappeared and absolute silence reigned in the street below. From the neighbouring Piazza di Spagna could be heard the occasional tinkle, tinkle of a tram-bell; but except for that sign of life the whole city might have been a city of the dead.

Suddenly across the silence cut the first note of midnight, and in an instant, as though at the touch of a magic wand, the

sleeping city was alive with noise and clatter. From the belfry of St. Peter's, from the Campidoglio, from the Trinità de' Monti, from a thousand brazen throats, came a call to the sleeping citizens to awake, to rejoice.

Hurriedly Jess glanced at the motionless form on the bed. Should she shut the windows? As she stood irresolute, Madge started up, in her wide, dilated eyes the look of one who listens. An instant it seemed as though she would ask the cause of this sudden Babel. Then the truth seemed to flash across her. She fell back upon the pillows. Her eyes closed. Her lips quivered an instant—then broke into the saddest smile Jess had ever seen.

It was the Easter bells.

## PART III





## CHAPTER I

*"BUONA PASQUA!"*

Frate Pampalloni was seated in a second-class compartment of the Milan night express. The carriage was crowded, the occupants being all English and—with one exception—women.

The *frate* and a young Englishman who was seated opposite to him were the only two who had made no attempt to sleep. It was the latter who, on glancing at his watch, wished his *vis-à-vis* "a happy Easter."

The *frate* cordially returned the greeting, but—perhaps out of deference to the would-be sleepers—without entering into conversation he at once took up the thread of his interrupted meditations. The light from the green-shaded lamp made all the occupants of the carriage look more or less ghastly, but the *frate* looked worried as well as white. Nor did his looks belie him. He was

worried. The causes of his worry were three-fold. Firstly, he was annoyed at having to leave Rome. Secondly, he was puzzled as to the origin of his annoyance. And, thirdly, he realised that such a feeling was a violation of his vow of obedience, which implied not only readiness but willingness to fulfil the orders of his superior. The matter puzzled him the more in that this was the first occasion upon which he had been, not only willing, but delighted to be entrusted with a new mission. Not that he was ambitious, or took any vain pleasure in his growing reputation as a preacher; but that, like his patron, Saint Francis of Assisi, he was consumed by a burning zeal for winning souls for God.

"One soul! Let it result in the winning of at least one precious soul!" was the prayer with which he had been wont to storm Heaven at the beginning of a new mission. The prayer to-night had not crossed his lips. He seemed to have fallen a victim to a strange sort of mental atrophy which robbed him of all power to think, to hope, or to pray.

"Your brain has been overtaxed. You are suffering from the effects of the mental

strain of the past six weeks," his reason suggested; but although he lazily acquiesced he remained unsatisfied, unconvinced.

Another point that puzzled him was that the reluctance to leave Rome had not seized him at once. On learning from the note given to him in the pulpit of the sudden illness of the *frate* who had been destined to undertake the mission at Milan and that he had been chosen to replace him, his first feeling had been one of mingled excitement and enthusiasm. This feeling had possessed him while communicating the news to his audience. Only when he craved their prayers for the success of his new mission did it flash across his mind that unless she happened to be present he was leaving, without a word of apology, a word of explanation, the convert he had made during the mission that was just concluded. This remembrance caused him a pang, and the pang was succeeded by a temptation to scan his audience with a view to discovering whether or not she were present. He was about to succumb to the temptation when he was suddenly seized by a strong impulse to resist it.

"She is present. There is no necessity to look. If you look, you are simply pandering to a weakness of the flesh." It was, he knew, the voice of conscience that spoke—a voice he had never yet disobeyed. Should he disobey it now? What did it matter, after all, whether or not she were present? If she were, he had given all the explanation that was necessary. If she were not, she would go on Monday to the monastery for her instruction and there learn the truth; and one of the other *frates*—What, he wondered, was the explanation of his swift recoil from the thought that another should finish the work begun by him? What the meaning of the renewed uncontrollable impulse to seek among the faces of his audience the face upon which he had looked daily during the past month—the face upon which he might never look again? Good God! was he mad, or was this some subtle, sensuous temptation of the Devil?

"It is a temptation. Resist it—or you are lost." Again the voice of conscience rose high above that other voice that was urging, imploring him to send a farewell

glance to one for whose salvation he had made himself responsible—one whom he might never again meet until they should meet in heaven. His brow bathed in perspiration, a strange tumult in his brain, with trembling hands he took from its socket the crucifix which stood at his side, and holding it high above the heads of his audience he fixed his gaze upon the thorn-crowned figure of the Christ, while in his usual clear, ringing tones he pronounced the papal benediction. He had gained the victory, but at what cost was evident from the trembling of his hands as he replaced the crucifix in its socket, from the pallor of his face as he stumbled down the pulpit steps.

Arrived in the sacristy, he had been met by the *frate* who had brought the news from the monastery, and in the hurry of departure he had had no time to ask himself the meaning of the strange conflict he had just been through. Not until the train steamed out of the station, and, with a great yearning, an inexplicable feeling of regret, he watched the dome of St. Peter grow smaller and smaller in the distance, did he

seek to unravel the mystery, did he wonder whether there might be some connection between his experience in San Luino and his new-born reluctance to leave Rome.

Even while putting the question to himself, his usually pale cheeks flamed, a horror-stricken look leaped to his eyes. What would the existence of such a connection imply? What *could* it imply, except that he, a priest of God, a man pledged to chastity, cherished an unworthy, a carnal passion for the body of the woman whose soul he had saved? Could such a thing be possible? Could he be capable of such baseness, of a crime so vile? "No, a thousand times No!" he told himself, every drop of blood in his body growing cold at the thought. His convert was nothing to him but a woman whose soul God in His infinite goodness had permitted him to put in the way of salvation. Yet wait! If the mystery were to be solved, as he vowed it should be solved, he must be perfectly candid with himself. That day—now some weeks back—when in his joy at his convert's desire to join him in prayer he had for an in-

stant taken her hands in his, had he not been conscious of a strange thrill, a still stranger reluctance to release them?

Then, again, when the question of his convert's first confession had arisen, why had he been pained by her apparent aversion from the thought of making him her confessor? Was it that he feared lest so lovely a casket might prove to contain jewels that were only paste? And why his sense of relief when by her naïve "I have nothing to confess of which I am ashamed," she had proved his fear to be groundless? Then, again, that very afternoon, why had he experienced so keen a regret, so acute a fear, when on the conclusion of her list of almost childlike offences, his convert had confessed to having committed a sin of which she was ashamed—a sin in connection with one of his sex? Why his sense of relief on learning the innocent result of her girlish vanity; and why, above all, his joy on hearing that the man whose indifference had annoyed her—was still indifferent?

By this time the *frate's* forehead was



bathed with perspiration, his face so ghastly that the young Englishman opposite thought of offering him his flask. But even now he would not admit that the conclusion to which the above chain of circumstances seemed to point was the true one. Having spent all his life in a monastery—left an orphan at eight years old, he had been educated by monks and become a monk without ever having seen the world—he had never been brought into contact with women. His convert was the first woman with whom he had ever been on intimate terms, and he told himself that in view of this, it was natural that such an intimacy should count for more in his life than it might in the life of another man—that it was inevitable that he should have been led into taking a friendly interest in her, and that such an interest would more than account for his conflict that evening in San Luino.

So delighted was he to have hit at last upon what he assured himself must be the key to the mystery that he breathed a deep sigh of relief, and taking out his Office-book he began to read. But it was no use. His

attention would stray, now to the Englishman opposite—who since the train started seemed to have done nothing but eat and drink—now to the other occupants of the carriage—who looked as unattractive as only female night-travellers can look—until at length, instead of their flushed, shiny faces, their wispy, dishevelled locks, he saw a pale oval face crowned with a mass of blue-black hair; a pair of violet eyes, now mocking, now tender; a mouth round which played the most provoking, the most enigmatical of smiles. Could she ever look so unattractive as these women looked? Would she not be as beautiful in *déshabille* as in *grande tenue*—more beautiful, perhaps? Could he not see her now, sleeping under the moonlight the deep, sweet sleep of innocent . . .

“Good God!”

With a violent effort he pulled himself up. Great beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead. His heart pounded like a sledge-hammer. His hands grew cold.

“God, let me die!” he prayed. “Let me die here . . . now . . . before I further defile my mind, before I further disgrace my

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habit, with such thoughts, with such imaginings!"

But for once his God was deaf. He did not die—and the thoughts continued to come.

## CHAPTER II

EASTER SUNDAY in Rome is no longer the Easter Sunday of fifty years ago. No longer is there a Papal Mass at St. Peter's. No longer does the Pope appear on the balcony facing the Piazza to bestow on the assembled crowd the Paschal blessing. But even to-day people flock to St. Peter's on Easter Sunday. At least there will be High Mass, celebrated by Cardinal Rampolla—and to many the man who should have been Pope is of more interest than the man who is. At least there will be a procession, in which the scarlet of cardinals will vie with the purple of monsignori, and Newman's "Men, not angels" text will be seen writ large on many a swarthy, sensuous face. At least one will meet one's friend and be free to discuss and criticise the Lenten services. At least, and above all, one will see the crowd, and a St. Peter's crowd—perhaps of all

crowds the most cosmopolitan—is always interesting.

“Where do they come from, and where *do* they get their clothes? Look at that woman who has just passed!”

As he spoke, Señor Montero nodded in the direction of a lean, crow-like woman in a worn sealskin coat, a tweed cycling skirt almost up to her knees, and a “flower” hat.

“*She* comes, I should say, from an old-clothes shop and is wearing most of the stock,” said Tom Rawling; while Jess exclaimed—

“Do you see those two coming out of the chapel of the Sacrament?”

Glancing in the direction indicated, the party saw a man in a garment like a brown serge kimono, his neck, arms and feet bare, and his hair brushed back from his forehead and hanging almost to his waist. The woman at his side was draped like a statue in some soft white material; her neck, arms and feet were also bare, and her hair was parted down the middle, taken back over her ears and held on top of her head by means of a single comb.

“It must require a certain amount of

nerve to come even here in a get-up like that," said Tom.

"Leaders of the Simple Life, with the courage of their convictions. I rather admire them," exclaimed Clarice; "and that way of doing the hair is very becoming. I'll try it when I go home."

"Don't!" whispered Carlos.

"Why not, pray?"—with a glance that would have been indignant, but which only succeeded in being coquettish.

"I like you as you are."

"You might like me better—as I might be."

"Impossible. The superlative was reached——"

"Come along, you two," interposed Tom. "You mustn't talk tonics in church, and I've found something that'll knock spots out of Miss Weatherdon's find."

While Jess and her friends were amusing themselves in St. Peter's, Madge was supposed to be hearing Mass at San Luino.

When as usual Annunciatina had knocked at her door, Madge had insisted that Jess

—who had spent the night on the sofa—should breakfast and go home.

“When I have breakfasted and had my bath, I shall feel all right,” she said, in answer to Jess’s suggestion that she should stay in bed and that she, Jess, should remain with her. “The excitement of the past few days has been too much for me—I must take things easy for a day or two.”

Something in her manner told Jess that there were to be no confidences. She was sorry. She felt that, could Madge have brought herself to discuss the situation, painful though such a discussion might prove for them both, it would be better in the end for Madge. But as she evidently meant to suffer in silence Jess could only acquiesce.

“I thought you were overdoing things. But you never were an apostle of moderation,” she said, speaking in her usual brisk, matter-of-fact tone; and she proposed that the dinner-party which was to take place that evening should be postponed. But to this Madge would not agree.

“I could not get through a fore-quarter of lamb by myself; and think of the blessing!”

she said, with a would-be smile. "If you can resist the lamb, I'm sure you can't resist the blessing."

"I can't bear to think of you being bothered with all those people when—when you're not feeling up to it," said Jess; and Madge's "I feel more up to it than to being left alone with my own thoughts," sent her home with a face about which there was nothing "Paschal."

When she had gone, Annunciatina returned to Madge's room, which, as soon as she opened the shutters, was flooded with sunshine. For once Madge was not glad to see it. It seemed to hurt her.

"*Buona Pasqua, Signorina!*" exclaimed Annunciatina, who was devoured with curiosity to know why Jess had remained all night, why Madge had not undressed, why she looked as though she had been stricken by the Evil Eye.

"A happy Easter!" replied Madge, in a voice that did not invite confidences.

"The Signorina will not communicate to-day?"

The Signorina would not communicate to-day. Then she might prepare breakfast



as usual? Yes, she might; and meanwhile would she kindly go, as the Signorina wished to undress. Might she not stay and assist the Signorina? The Signorina thanked her, but she did not require any assistance.

"Something has happened! She's as white as my teeth; and when I wished her a happy Easter she looked as though I had stabbed her," Annunziata confided to Louise; who, however, evinced a deplorable dearth of ideas as to the nature of the mysterious "something."

"If anything has happened, I can trust you to discover what it is," she said, looking up with mingled cunning and confidence from the peas she was shelling; "and if nothing has happened, why should I addle my brains?"

"I'm glad to hear you've got any brains to addle," sneered the "intelligent one," taking a handful of peas and crunching them with her strong white teeth. "Nobody would suspect it."

Louise's face flushed in a way that generally portended trouble, but mindful of the Easter egg with which she had been presented half an hour before, she filled her

mouth so full of peas that speech was impossible—and the critical moment passed.

Torn asunder though one's life may be, one must wash and dress and eat; and Madge went through all these processes in the mechanical way one does go through them at such a time.

"I won't think, I *won't* think," she kept repeating to herself in the intervals upon which thought made desperate attempts to seize; but she found that it was easier to make the resolution than to keep it. She kept it, however, in a sort of way until, an hour later, she found herself in San Luino, seated in the place where she had sat every day during the past six weeks—the place in which she had been seated when the scales had fallen from her eyes and she had seen herself—at last—for the fool she now knew herself to have been.

As she raised her eyes to the empty pulpit, as she looked upon the crucifix upon which so lately he had looked—which so lately had known the touch of his hands, the thoughts which until then she had been able to keep in check rushed and crowded in upon her

so violently, so irresistibly, that the frail barrier erected against them by her will broke down, and they had her at their mercy.

She loved him. She had vowed to make *him* love *her*; and after four weeks' intimacy he had left her as indifferently as though they had never met; while she—— When had she begun to love him? Why had she not suspected? Was this the meaning of the happiness which had suddenly transformed her life, and which in her folly she had attributed to her conversion? *Was* she converted, or had the conversion been a dream—a beautiful dream, but still a dream—and was this love which terrified her—it was so strong, so agonising, so hopeless—the reality? The questions pressed upon her so quickly, they clamoured so loudly for an answer, her brain reeled.

“I know nothing,” she told herself, “except that I love him—that I shall always love him, however sinful, however hopeless, the love may be. ‘When did I begin to love him?’ What does it matter? Perhaps I loved him from the first. Perhaps it was love, not vanity, that made me act as I did.

‘Why did I not suspect?’ Because I was a fool. Because I had always mocked at love—at the possibility that it could ever touch me. ‘Was this the meaning of the happiness that had so suddenly transformed my life?’ Of course it was; and it is this which is teaching me now—here—what unhappiness is. Not the unhappiness I used to feel, but *real* unhappiness, to know which one must have known its opposite. Until the last few weeks I never knew what it was to be really happy. Now—I know. ‘Am I converted, or was the conversion a dream; the love that is killing me—that will kill me, unless I can kill it—the reality?’”

To all the other questions the answers had come readily. They had been foregone conclusions. This question she found a difficulty in answering.

“If I were a true Catholic,” she asked herself, “should I not now be praying, praying for strength to fight against this love which, from a Catholic’s point of view, is not only hopeless but sinful?” She admitted to herself that this was so. She also admitted that it was the first time that the thought of prayer had crossed her mind.

"Perhaps if I could pray," she thought, "I should feel less lost, less miserable. Perhaps the realisation that, day after day, so long as I live, I shall be haunted by the thought of him, by the longing to see him, by the yearning to hear his voice, would hurt less."

No sooner did the hope spring up in her heart than she dropped upon her knees. She buried her face in her hands. But, instead of a prayer, a question rose to her lips. To Whom was she to pray? To the God who had taught her the meaning of happiness only to make her realise that she should never experience it? To the God who had revealed to her her capacity for loving—a capacity so great that it surprised while it terrified her—only to tell her that the capacity was destined to prove nothing but torture to her? To the God who had pointed out to her the signification of the blank of whose existence in her life she had always been conscious, only to warn her that the blank must ever remain a blank? Was not all this the work of a fiend rather than of a God? Why should she pray to a fiend? If God, as the Church maintained, were om-

niscient and omnipotent, He had known what would be the result of her friendship with the *frate*—had not only known, but had foreordained it. Why should she thank Him for having ruined a life which, if it had hitherto attained to no exalted heights of happiness, had at least been free from pain?

Having put the question, with bowed head and aching heart, she awaited the answer. Surely there would be an answer? Surely she was not to be robbed of the power to pray as well as of the power to love? The reply came. It was the reply the *frate* had made when during the course of one of the instructions she had questioned God's prerogative of mercy, in view of all the suffering, of all the misery, in the world. "To suffer is to be favoured of God. Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." And now, as then, her soul rose in revolt against such a solution of the mystery of human pain.

"I don't *want* to be chastened. . . . I don't want to be loved by a God who shows His love by hurting its object! What human lover would delight in seeing the object of his love writhe in the throes of an agony

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ordained by him? Why should God be less merciful than man?"

The Mass was over. The church was empty except for Madge, and hearing the rattling of keys, which told that the doors were about to be closed, she rose and moved down the deserted aisle. As she passed the confessional where she had knelt the previous day she wondered if ever again she would experience the sense of relief, the feeling of perfect happiness, she had experienced on hearing the *frate's* "Go in peace, my child. Thy sins are forgiven thee."

"I suppose it is something to have known even one moment's perfect happiness," she said to herself as she found herself in the crowded, noisy Corso; but her philosophical mood did not last long, and she shuddered as she realised what service her "one moment" would have to render during the long, dreary years she saw stretching out, grey and hopeless, before her.

## CHAPTER III

"MADGE, you'll never guess what has happened. I'll give you three chances. No, Tom, you're not to tell." Clarice was about to put her hand over Tom's mouth when that young man exclaimed—

"It's your cheeks you'd better cover, my dear. They're the tell-tales, not I."

Madge—who had received her guests with an imitation of her usual manner sufficiently successful to deceive even Jess—glanced quickly from Clarice to Carlos. "Tom is right. No guessing is required—with those cheeks," she said. Then kissing one of the "tell-tales," "I hope you will be very happy; and if *you* are not"—turning to Carlos—"it will be your own fault. You'll have the sweetest little wife in the world; and Clarice"—throwing a glance over her shoulder at Señor Montero as she took the two girls into the adjoining room—



"will have the most charming father-in-law."

"I'll kill that old buffer before I'm through," said Tom. "Will you act second, Capitano? He's cut us both out."

"If there's any killing to be done I'd rather do it myself, thanks," replied the Captain, with a glance at the "old buffer" which astonished the latter not a little.

"When did the tragedy occur?" asked Madge, as she helped Clarice to disentangle herself from her wraps.

"To-day, coming from St. Peter's. Oh, Madge"—flinging her arms round the other's neck and kissing her over and over again—"you can't think what a darling he is, and how happy I am!"

Madge's lip quivered as she met the look on the pretty, upturned face, and her voice was not quite steady as she said—

"I always thought him a nice boy. Jess used to get quite angry with me because——"

"*You* didn't like him?"—turning to Jess with an astonishment so genuine that both her listeners laughed.

Jess looked a trifle embarrassed. Clarice,

she thought, would have been still more astonished had she known how much she had *disliked* the "darling."

"Whenever Madge begins to 'enthuse,' or abuse, I act as brake—on principle," she said in a non-committal tone. "She has a way of dividing the world into black and white, while I know that the best and the worst of us are—mottled."

"I hope you won't dare to call Carlos mottled—at least to me," pouted Clarice, who, though mollified, was not wholly satisfied by this explanation; but Jess laughed.

"I shall never call him anything in future but the luckiest man in the world," and the kiss that followed did what a thousand more plausible explanations would have been powerless to do.

"I wish I had known the news earlier," Madge said, when dinner was announced. "I would have got some champagne. As it is, we'll have to be content with *Asti spumanti*."

"Nothing '*spumanti*' for me or Carlos, *please*," exclaimed Clarice, in the mildly authoritative tone in which she was wont to

lay down her medical axioms. "Effer-vescing drinks are death to the digestion."

"Is Carlos's digestion to be treated as well as yours? *Madonna mia!* save me from a medical wife!" laughed Tom; and he laughed still more when Carlos quite seriously produced from his waistcoat pocket a bottle of pellets, and handing them to Clarice, said with a Grandisonian bow—

"Take one of those, *amore*, and the *Asti* won't hurt you."

"All I want to know is what they'll be like at eighty," said Tom; and in spite of Clarice's imploring glances he described her latest medical discovery—an electric battery in the form of a miniature lawn-roller, and declared that since its arrival he had been unable to get her to go anywhere or to do anything—she was always rolling out her wrinkles.

"She hasn't got any," Carlos indignantly exclaimed.

"Then she's rolling the place where they're to grow—preparing the ground, I suppose."

"Tom, how can you be so ridiculous? You know quite well I only use the battery

when I have neuralgia. Every one knows that electricity is *the* thing for the nerves."

"What a pity Carlos did not know about it sooner!" said Jess. "Whenever a place got on his nerves he could have rolled it off again. Much less expensive and less troublesome than a move."

"I think they're being very rude to us, don't you?" said Clarice, bestowing upon Carlos a look which more than compensated for the rudeness.

"Laughing aids the digestion. I'm glad they find us amusing," he replied; but there was rather a dangerous glitter in his "Raphaelesque" eyes. "I'd rather have a wife with nerves than a wife with a tongue like a razor," he was thinking; and not for the first time he wondered what attraction his father could find in a woman like Jess.

Since dinner began Jess had lived in dread of the moment when allusion should be made—as sooner or later was sure to happen—to the *frate*. So far, she felt sure, no one could have suspected from Madge's manner the strain which, she knew, she must be putting upon herself. She herself—in spite of last night's experience—should

hardly have suspected it, had it not been for the almost hectic colour which burned on her usually pale cheeks, the occasional note of recklessness in her gaiety. The dreaded moment came at last.

"So your *frate* has gone away, Miss Ockleston?" said Tom, glancing at Madge with a curiosity which made Jess long to strangle him.

"Yes," said Madge. "He left Rome last night."

"Most probably been sent to China or the West Indies, or some outlandish place, to convert the heathen," continued Tom. "Rather rot sending a good-looking youngster like that out to be made soup of. Old bones are good enough to stew."

Try as she might, Jess could not keep her eyes from wandering to Madge. The hectic flush had been replaced by a deathlike pallor, and the touch of recklessness she had noted once or twice before rang in her laugh as she said—

"Let us wish him a better fate than you seem to expect."

"Oh, I don't say that he mayn't escape the stewpan," said Tom, peeling his peach

with an air of provoking impartiality. "But personally I would as soon be boiled as flayed alive."

"Are all missionaries either boiled or flayed alive?" asked Clarice, her eyes as large as saucers.

"All—unless the cooking process happens to be interrupted, when they occasionally escape in a parboiled or parflayed condition. I met an awfully decent fellow last summer who——"

"Do find a more cheerful subject," laughed Jess. "Cannibalism does not go at all well with *Asti spumanti*."

Madge's face had grown whiter and whiter as Tom proceeded, but now, conscious of the cause of Jess's interruption, the hectic patches reappeared and her laugh was reckless to the verge of hysteria as she said—

"It's your turn, Capitano, to choose a subject. I don't believe you've said a word ever since dinner began."

It was true. All the Captain's attention had been given to studying Madge. Love, they say, is blind. There is more truth in the saying that Love sees all. Bravely as

Madge had played the game—so bravely as almost to deceive even Jess—she had not deceived the man who loved her.

“He’s gone. She’s broken-hearted, but she’s too proud to show it. Damn those sneaking, snivelling priests! They can’t have the women for themselves, and they spoil them for those who can,” he had said to himself after watching Madge for a few minutes; and during Tom’s cheerful prognostications of the *frate’s* probable fate his black eyes had gleamed in a way that made Madge turn sick and cold.

“Let them boil, roast or fry him, so long as they keep him from coming back here,” he thought; and with the unconscious cruelty of a man thwarted in love he said—

“From Cannibalism to Conversion seems a natural step. I have not yet congratulated you, Miss Ockleston, upon your reception into the Church.”

“They have gone—at last!”

Madge threw open the window and stood letting the cool night air play upon her burning forehead. Would it always be like this? she wondered. Would she always

have to smile and laugh and chatter, while her brain was ready to burst, while her heart——

“We usen’t to know that we had a heart, did we, Gigi?” she said, as Gigi rubbed himself against her dress—the sign that he wanted to be taken up and caressed. “He’s gone, Gigi, and he may never come back again. On just such a night as this those horrible sav——”

Gigi nestled closer to the usually cool cheek, to-night so flushed and feverish; and as he met the look in the eyes he loved his own grew tragically wistful. If only he could *speak*! If only he could remind her that she had *him*! He was not much of a thing, certainly. Even as dogs go he was a very, very little dog, but at that moment his heart felt big. If only she knew *how* big it felt, how it ached for her, how it longed to share her grief!

“I know, Gigi—I know what you would like to say,” she whispered, understanding the meaning of the dumb, beseeching glance, “and you’re a darling! But——”

“I’m only a dog?” The glance was half apologetic, half reproachful.



Instead of replying, Madge buried her face in the absurd little ruff which tried so hard to be leonine; and when a few minutes later Gigi nestled into his usual place at the foot of the bed, his ruff felt strangely damp.

## CHAPTER IV

ON arriving home at the pension Jess and the Monteros were asked to join the other pensionnaires who were having a musical evening; and at one stage of the proceedings Jess and Señor Montero had the smaller of the two adjoining salons to themselves. Señor Montero was full of his son's engagement. He could speak of nothing else. The sooner the marriage took place the better it seemed should he be pleased. Clarice wished to remain in Rome; and as so far it had failed to get upon his son's nerves, he thought they might as well settle there as anywhere else.

"You would like to settle here?" asked Jess, wondering whether the other had yet realised the blank the loss of Carlos would make in his life. That he had was evident from the tone in which he said—

"I should not care to travel alone; and if one must be lonely——"

"But you will not be lonely," interrupted Jess. "You will have Carlos and Clarice."

The old man shook his head. "A son married is a son lost. Not"—the sad look giving place to his usual optimistic smile—"that I am not delighted at my boy's good luck."

"Good luck? Your views on matrimony seem to have undergone rather a sudden change," laughed Jess; but the other would not own to any inconsistency.

"I always admitted the presence of prizes in the most hazardous of all lotteries," he said, "and Carlos certainly has drawn one."

"His good luck should encourage you to try again. Once the excitement of the wedding is over, you will miss having no one to fuss over and coddle as you have fussed over and coddled Carlos."

Again the slightly wistful look appeared on the old man's face. "I am coming to an age when I shall need some one to fuss over and coddle me!"

"The 'some one' should not be difficult to find." Jess spoke without the faintest

suggestion of an *arrière pensée*; but she also spoke with such evident sincerity, there was such a kind light in her eyes as they met those of her companion, that a tiny seedling of hope which for long had lain hidden in the latter's breast suddenly sprouted, and gained such gigantic proportions that in an instant it choked the fears and doubts which for weeks had stood in the way of its being anything *but* a seedling.

"There is only one woman in the world whom I should like to fuss over and coddle me," he said, passing his hand through his hair and wondering if ever an old fool had made quite such a fool of himself as he was making.

Jess took a sudden and sharp dislike to the unknown woman, but there was nothing but friendliness towards her in her voice as she asked—

"And is she ready to take on the duties of fusser and coddler?"

"That is the question. But it is one for you to answer—not for me."

"For *me*?"

Had the other entertained any doubt during the above conversation as to his com-

panion's ignorance as to whither that conversation was drifting, Jess's look of blank and utter astonishment would effectively have dissipated it. That the old man liked her and sought her society she knew, but that he should want to marry her had never crossed her mind.

"Miss Weatherdon!"

Jess started, and as she met the look in the eyes which were usually only humorous and kind, a blush as vivid as it was becoming gradually crept over her sallow cheeks.

"Miss Weatherdon, do you think you could ever care sufficiently for an old wreck like me, to——"

"See that he doesn't go about buttonless," —pointing to the gaps on his waistcoat—"and that he has a fire in his room, instead of sitting wrapped up as though he were bound for the North Pole, and that he has his coffee made for him, instead of making it for other people? *I already care——*"

"You *care* for me, Jess? You mean it?"

The "Don Juanish" eyes were not so "innocent" as usual, and the hand that clasped Jess's was strong and firm as that of a young

man. The colour in Jess's cheeks grew more and more vivid.

"I care for you quite enough for my peace of mind." Then laughingly—"You don't expect me to enthuse as I make the people in my novels enthuse, do you?"

"I expect nothing!"—doing something that Jess had not expected, but to which she did not seem to object. "I have nothing left to expect—since you have given me yourself."

It was quite half an hour later when Señor Montero, in the fewest possible words and with no comments, bitter or otherwise, related the story of his first marriage.

At eighteen, an idealist of the most pronounced description, he had married a girl whom he imagined to be the embodiment of his ideal. Ten years later she had left him for a man as materialistic as he was the reverse, having in the meantime made his life and his son's a hell upon earth.

"What was she like?" asked Jess, with a woman's natural desire to picture to herself her predecessor in the affections of the man she loves.

"She was everything that you are not."

"That means she was beautiful, fascinating——"

A look she had never before seen, and which she never wished to see again, distorted for an instant the other's face.

"It means that she was false, shallow, vain, egotistical. But why speak of her? It is sacrilege to mention her in the same breath with you. My only wish in regard to her is to forget that such a woman ever lived."

And as with a low "We will never speak of her again," Jess changed the subject, she vowed that if his wish were not fulfilled, the fault should not be hers.

"Two engagements in one day! We're pairing off like the animals in Noah's Ark. If only Madge would marry the Captain, we could have a triple wedding. Wouldn't it be fun?" exclaimed Clarice, on hearing the news. "Do you think, Miss Weatherdon, the Captain has any chance?"

At the mention of Madge Jess's face—the previous moment almost as rosy and as

radiant as that of the questioner—suddenly clouded, and Clarice was surprised by the tone in which she said—

“I don’t think Madge will ever marry.”



## CHAPTER V

ONE morning early in May saw Madge again seated in the tram bound for San Michel. Such a different Madge! Even the conductor—who seeing her every day for a month had come to take quite a friendly interest in her—noticed the change, and said, as he gave her her ticket, “The Signorina has had the fever?”

Madge shook her head. “It is the heat,” she said, a red wave dyeing her face, then leaving it paler than before.

“The Signorina should go to Porto D’Anzio. Why stay in Rome in May when one can get away?”

“Why indeed?” said Madge, and she breathed a sigh of relief as the arrival of another fare distracted the man’s attention and left her free to return to her meditations.

These were not cheerful. The past fortnight had seemed like a century. She who

had always slept from the moment she laid her head on the pillow until awakened by Annunciatina, now was obliged to read herself to sleep, to awaken at about three o'clock, then toss and turn and dread the coming day, until at length the accustomed knock would tell her that the round of dull mechanical duties—dressing, eating, walking—had to be begun once more.

After breakfast she generally went to San Luino. Why she went she hardly knew. When she got there she did not pray. She did not think. Her one aim now, day and night, was to keep her mind a blank. "If I begin to think, I shall go mad," she told herself. So she would wander aimlessly about the church, looking, now at the pulpit where he had stood, now at the confessional where he had knelt. Then she would sit and watch the peasants at their prayers, watch the children playing hide and seek among the pillars and treating the church as though it were a playground—which to all intents and purposes it was—watch the sleek black cat—the property of the caretaker—which grew so accustomed to seeing her there that it came and perched itself on her

knee as a matter of course, much to the detriment of her summer frocks.

After luncheon she generally had some calls to pay, some engagement to fulfil, for above all things she dreaded lest people, noting any change in her habits, should draw deductions. About the change in her appearance she did not worry. In Rome one can look pale with impunity. One day the ever useful sirocco can be held accountable; the next, a touch of fever can be pleaded; and—in May—everything else failing, one can blame the heat. So it happened that in spite of Madge's white cheeks and haggard eyes, nobody except the Captain suspected the truth. This morning, during the long, weary hours when she had lain listening for Annunciatina's knock, the idea had suddenly struck her to change her morning programme. Why, instead of going to San Luino, should she not go to San Michel? She would feel nearer to him there, in the church in which for years he had prayed day after day. Who knew that she might not hear some tidings of him, that she might at least learn where he had gone?

. . . . .

Rome was beginning to be oppressively hot. Already most of the *forestieri* had betaken themselves to Siena, Livorno, or Perugia, while even the residents were preparing for their annual *villeggiatura*. Fans fluttered everywhere. The very beggars seated on the church steps fanned themselves with one hand, while stretching out the other for a *soldo*. The lemonade-sellers at the street corners did a thriving trade, and the poor flower-hawkers in the Piazza di Spagna mopped their foreheads as they ran to and fro between their stalls and the fountain into whose boat-shaped basin they had to keep constantly dipping their wares, which in spite of their efforts were withered and scorched by the rays of the blazing, pitiless sun.

"Why don't you leave Rome? You look awfully played out, and there's nothing to keep you here," Jess had said to Madge the previous day.

"I don't object to the heat and I do object to a move," Madge had replied. "As soon as the heat begins to bother me I shall go." And seeing that persuasion would be useless, Jess had said no more.

Could anything have aroused Madge out of the lethargic state into which she seemed to have fallen, it would have been the news of Jess's engagement, but glad though she was to think of her friend's happiness, there was a sting in the thought that hurt.

"They are all," she said to herself, "to be happy—except me. I am to be the looker-on. I shall never do anything now except—look on."

The prospect, at twenty-six, is not a cheerful one; and instead of imbuing Madge with a spirit of resignation it goaded her to revolt. Why should she be miserable when all these others were happy? Why should love be dead to her and not to them? Why should she have to face life alone, while these had each his or her chosen companion?

"What can it be? What can be the matter with her?" Annunciatina, "the intelligent," would ask Louise, "the lethargic." "She isn't the same Signorina. She never reads. She never plays the piano. She never talks to Gigi. She just sits looking at nothing with those great eyes of hers until she makes me feel quite queer. Per-

haps"—her own lighting up with a new idea—"she's going mad."

"Perhaps you are going mad—with unsatisfied curiosity," replied Louise. "Cannot a Signorina—a beautiful Signorina like ours—perhaps be in love?"

In love! The Signorina in love! That was certainly an idea, and for the few following days the "intelligent one" spent hours searching boxes and writing-tables for some clue as to the identity of the lover. "He doesn't write to her, and she doesn't write to him," was the result of her labours as confided to Louise; and again the latter went up two or three degrees in her estimation as she exclaimed—

"If the Signorina prefers talking to writing, what is it to us? And if the Corso is too crowded for lovers, are not the churches open to all?"

It was eleven o'clock when Madge arrived at San Michel. The lay brother who generally conducted her to the monastery was showing a party of tourists round the church. Mechanically her eyes strayed to the choir where she had once heard the

monks chanting their morning office, and her heart contracted as she thought, "*He* may never chant there again." Her eyes next wandered to the pulpit from which his voice must often and often have sounded. It may never sound again. Blinded by tears, her eyes sought the ground trodden daily by the feet she loved. What foreign ground might not those feet be treading now, or had they not yet reached their journey's end? Were they still journeying hourly farther and farther out of her life until at length she would be unable even in spirit to follow?

"Why did I come?" she asked herself, moving disconsolately towards the door. "Was I not suffering sufficiently? Was it necessary further to harrow my——"

She stopped. Pasted on the entrance wall was a notice on which stood out, in large prominent letters—his name!

As the letters one by one burnt themselves into her brain, her heart seemed suddenly to stop beating; then began to thump, thump, as though it would burst. For an instant she thought she was going to faint. The letters in the notice danced before her eyes.

Everything went black. Then the sick, faint sensation passed. Gradually the letters steadied themselves, the print again became clear. She went closer to the notice. She read it.

*"He's coming back!"*

"Did the Signorina speak?"

Madge had spoken. In her surprise, in her sudden joy, the words had escaped her. They had been almost a cry.

"Frate Pampalloni is to preach to-morrow night?" she said, pretending not to have heard the question, and not daring to raise her eyes lest the man should see the joy that was blazing in them.

"Yes. He's to preach the nine days' Novena in honour of San Michel. The Signorina knows that to-morrow is the eve of the Feast of San Michel."

The Signorina had not known, and she would like to know the time of the evening service.

"There will be Rosary and a prayer to San Michel at Ave Maria, and afterwards the sermon," said the man, adding, as Madge opened her purse, "If the Signorina wishes to have a good place she'd better be



here at five o'clock. There's always a crowd when Frate Pampalloni is to preach."

Madge gave the man a tip that made him vow that she should have the best place in the church, if he had to sit in it all day to keep it for her; and the following moment Madge was out again in the blazing sunshine.

"He's coming back!" Over and over again she repeated the words, and with each repetition the blood raced more swiftly through her veins, her heart beat more wildly, until like Annunciatina she came to the conclusion that she must be going mad.

"It's better to go to 'Santo Spirito' through joy than through sorrow," she told herself with a little laugh; and a woman begging of her, she gave her the first coin that came to her hand, and in reply to her look of mute surprise she laughed again, and whispered—

*"He's coming back!"*

As she drew near to San Clemente, possessed by a longing to pray, to thank "someone" for the joy with which her heart was brimming over, she passed through the quaint, barn-like porch; and on the spot

where the old peasant woman had knelt on the day when she had said her first prayer she flung herself upon her knees.

"Forgive me!" she prayed. "Thou who so lovest man that Thou didst lay down Thy life for him, forgive me for having loved a man more than I love Thee. It was because I loved him so, because I have been so miserable without him, that I have been unable to communicate, unable to pray. I thought that Thou wert cruel, that Thou hadst taken him from me, but now I know that Thou art not cruel—Thou art kind! He is coming back! Let me only see him. Let me only hear his voice. I ask nothing more—I need nothing more. He is Thine, O God! Body and soul, he is Thine. I know it. I know that he can never be mine. But at least there can be no harm in my having his friendship—his help."

As she prayed, her joy which before had been so great as almost to overpower her, gradually gave way to a sense of peace, of rest. "Thy minister . . . my friend. Thou canst not grudge me his friendship. It is so little to ask. But with it, I can be happy. I can be good. Without it—Thou knowest"

—smiling a sad little smile—“what I have been without it.”

She rose from her knees. She genuflected before the Blessed Sacrament. As she left the church she crossed herself with holy water. She felt that by attending to all these Catholic observances she was fulfilling her part of the compact, and that therefore God could not but fulfil His. It did not strike her—she was not in a mood in which so rational a thought would strike her—that it takes two to make a compact, and that this compact was of her making—not of God’s.

As she turned into the Via Condotti, she met Jess.

“Madge! what has happened?” asked the latter, after glancing at her friend’s face; and her own grew grave as she heard Madge’s joyous

*“He’s coming back!”*

## CHAPTER VI

MADGE spent another sleepless night, but this time it was joy, not sorrow, that kept sleep at bay. This time, instead of shuddering as she saw the grey light of dawn creep in through the shutters, telling of the birth of another day, she laughed softly to herself. . . . "Day at last! The day that is to bring him back!"

How would he look? Would he be changed? Would he notice the change in her? What should she say, should he comment on her appearance? How should she explain not having communicated on Easter Sunday? The thoughts crowded in upon her, seeking to disturb her new-found tranquillity; but she waved them aside.

"That can all be arranged to-morrow. I shall not speak to him until to-morrow. To-day I will think of nothing except that he is coming back—that every day I shall see

him; that every night, instead of picturing him to myself suffering untold tortures in a far-off land, I shall know that the same sky covers us, that the same stars are watching us while we sleep; that the church bells that awaken him awaken me, that the streets trodden by him during the long, happy day will be trodden by me. . . .”

When Annunciatina knocked at the door—softly, lest the Signorina who had been sleeping so badly lately should have fallen into a sleep from which she would not wish to be disturbed—Madge sprang out of bed, and as she dressed she sang.

“I was right!—the Signorina *is* going mad, quite mad,” Annunciatina confided to Louise. “Yesterday morning she was as glum as a *guardia*, and looked as though she had committed all the seven deadly sins; and to-day she is singing like a bird.”

How that day passed Madge never knew, but it did pass; and on the stroke of five she was mounting the steps leading to San Michel—the happiest woman in Rome. The lay brother whose heart she—or her tip—had won the previous day had not forgotten her, and she found that a place had

been reserved for her immediately below the pulpit.

"The *frate* arrived an hour ago," the lay brother said, as he showed her to it. "He looks dog-tired, and who knows if he will do justice to himself to-night? But, *speriamol*!"

He had arrived! Madge knelt down, but she could not pray. Her heart was too full, her brain too active. Mechanically her eyes strayed to the door leading into the monastery. It was open. Already all the available sitting-room in the church was exhausted and additional chairs and benches were being brought out from the enclosure.

*Paziénza!* one can't make chairs, and benches haven't legs," the burly lay brother kept saying to the people who were clamouring for seats; and Madge experienced a little thrill of pride as she felt that others besides herself were eager to welcome the *frate* on his return, eager to hear again the voice which seemed to have been silent for centuries.

At half-past five the Rosary began, but instead of Ave Marias and Paternosters, priest and people seemed to Madge to be

repeating over and over again in their monotonous, sing-song voices, "He is here. A few moments more, and you will see him." When, the Rosary over, the priest began to say the prayer to Saint Michel, a sudden trembling seized Madge; the colour flew from her cheeks. Her heart beat so quickly that it hurt her—her breath came in short, laboured gasps. How this love of which all her life she had made a mockery was avenging itself! This love, whose very existence she had doubted—why, nothing but it *did* exist! Without it, life was not life. It was death—without death's peace.

The prayer was over. The priests and acolytes had disappeared. The people rose from their knees and turned their chairs towards the pulpit. A hush fell on the crowded church. It seemed to Madge as though the sole sound in the vast building were the beating of her heart. She felt that it must be audible to all. If only it would stop for an instant! If only it would let her breathe!

"Here he is!"

"But how thin, how pale!"

"He looks quite old!"

"I should never have known him again. Would you?"

The words were wafted to Madge, but she barely heard them. A strange buzzing was in her ears, a mist was before her eyes.

"Signoril!"

Ah! at last the voice she had never hoped to hear again!

As it fell on the deathlike silence her limbs ceased to tremble, a feeling of peace, a joy in which there was no mingling of pain, took possession of her heart, and bade its wild beating be still. But even yet she dared not look up. She felt that, should his eyes once meet hers, he would see in them something she would rather die than that he should see. She would wait for a moment—wait until his dreamy, vision-seeing eyes should be fixed as usual on his unseen auditor, who as usual would blind him to aught else.

"If thy right hand scandalise thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. And if thy right eye scandalise thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. For it is better for thee that one of thy members should perish, than



that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

As the words of the text fell upon her ears, Madge felt a sudden shock. Not that the text itself surprised her. It was the tone in which it was spoken—the tone of one who hurls defiance at an unseen foe—who speaks out of a heart in which is raging a fierce, a mortal conflict. Madge's eyes flew to the speaker's face. She experienced a second shock, greater than the first. No wonder some one had declared that she would never have known him again.

Much as Madge herself had changed during the past fortnight, she saw in an instant that the change in her was as nothing compared with the change in the *frate*. His appearance, as his voice, was that of a man engaged in some deadly conflict, the issue of which still hangs in the balance—his face lined and haggard, in his eyes a strange, haunted expression; his mouth drawn into a line of stern, almost dogged determination. When he began to speak, his very voice was different. It struck Madge as the voice of one tempted—tempted beyond his power of resistance—and

trembling lest he should yield to the temptation. True, he still addressed himself to his unseen auditor, but in such a manner as to impress one with the conviction that he did so, not voluntarily, but at the command of conscience, and that his eyes would fain have been elsewhere.

If the manner of the preacher were different, so was his matter. Never before in any of his sermons had Madge known him make the slightest allusion to the strongest of human passions, the love of man for woman. Yet to-night he had chosen his text with a view to painting the power of that passion, its deadly power, should it be unlawful. He spoke almost as might one who himself were wrestling in the throes of such a passion, one who was drawing on his own experience when he told of the horrors of the conflict, of the ruthlessness with which the foe must be met, of the danger of any attempt at compromise.

"If thy right hand scandalise thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. And if thy right eye scandalise thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. For it is better for thee that one

of thy members should perish than that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

As once more the words of the text—spoken with a passion, a vindictiveness, quite out of keeping with the preacher's usual manner—rang through the silent church, a thought flashed across Madge's mind which caused her a pang as painful as it was novel. During the course of the mission he had just concluded, could the *frate* have met his fate as unexpectedly as she had met hers during the mission at San Luino? Was it against the call of the flesh that he was summoning all his powers of resistance? Would not this theory—if true—account not only for his having chosen so extraordinary a text, but also for the change in his manner, his appearance?

For a moment the suspicion found a resting-place in her breast, then quickly, disdainfully, she cast it aside. He, the ascetic, the dreamer, the visionary, to succumb to an earthly passion, to be torn and lacerated as she had been torn and lacerated, on the rack of a love as deep as it was hopeless! The idea was absurd. If ever man were destined to be free from such a fate it was he, and she

was glad that it should be so. Not for worlds would she have had him suffer what she had suffered, what she would suffer to the end of her life. Not for worlds would she have him learn the meaning, as she had learned it, of the most agonising of all human pains.

As though conscious of what was passing through her mind, the preacher's voice took a new note—a note of scorn, almost of defiance.

"You think, Signori," he said, "that we monks are superhuman, that the storms that wreck and shatter the lives of less sheltered mortals pass us by. It is not so, Signori. We are not angels. *We are men*—men with the passions of men, the instincts, the weaknesses of men; and when we tell you, as I have just told you, to stand ever on the alert to meet and resist the assaults of the foe that is within us all, to yield to it no inch of ground, to combat it daily, hourly, to resist all its plausible suggestions of compromise, to lay down arms against it only on your death-beds, we speak, not from book-knowledge, not from hearsay, but because we *know*. Because we ourselves have

engaged in the conflict; we ourselves have given no quarter to the enemy; we ourselves have vowed to cry 'Peace!' to it only with our dying breath." He paused for an instant, then continued, his voice grown suddenly so weak that one could hardly hear it—"And when you pray for yourselves that God may be with you in the struggle, that He may uphold you with His strength, encourage you with His voice, and finally crown you victors, pray also for those to whom defeat would be a thousand times more shameful, a thousand times more degrading, than to you."

"What an extraordinary sermon!"

"He speaks almost as though he himself were fighting an unlawful passion."

"Perhaps he is. He's young, and a *bel homo*. *Chi lo sa?*"

Again the comments of her neighbours were wafted to Madge. This time they did not fall upon unheeding ears.

"He! . . . In love with another woman!" God had been cruel to her, but surely, surely He might have spared her—that!"

## CHAPTER VII

It was midnight. The monastery lights were out—all except one. In Frate Pam palloni's cell a candle still burned. He had forgotten to put it out. Suddenly it began to splutter, then flickered uncertainly for a few seconds, then with a great spluttering and fizzling it went out. The *frate*—who was kneeling at the bedside, his face buried in his hands—did not look up. Night after night during the past fortnight he had knelt thus, wrestling with Satan for his soul, imploring Heaven to restore to him his peace of mind; or, should it be God's will that he should suffer temptation, that at least strength might be given him to resist it.

It was these weary vigils that had lined his face, that had stolen the light of youth from his eyes, that had given to his mouth its look of dogged determination. Since the

night when he had first suspected himself of harbouring in his breast a passion which, unless overcome, would assuredly prove his soul's destruction, he had left no means untried to overcome it. He had prayed. He had fasted. He had scourged the rebellious flesh. But to no purpose. The more he fasted, the less strong was he to resist the onslaughts of the enemy; the more he mortified the flesh, the more it rebelled. Not over one of his senses had he the slightest control. Look at what he might, his Office-book, his crucifix, the Host Itself, he saw nothing but a pure oval face; a pair of violet eyes, now mocking, now tender; a pair of lips that set his blood aflame. Listen to what he would—the conversation of his brother-priests, the music in the churches wherein his leisure hours were spent, he heard nothing but a low, musical voice whose tone set every nerve in his body tingling and brought the colour surging to his face.

“It is a temptation of the Devil,” said the voice of conscience. “Maddened by your gift for winning souls, he seeks by this means to compass your destruction. Resist the

temptation, and it will pass, to return no more."

God knows he did all that man may do to obey the voice of conscience, but instead of passing, the temptation grew stronger—it grew irresistible, until at length, mentally and physically prostrated, he felt that should the struggle continue, he must go mad or he must die.

Nor was this all. Now, when he most required all his faith in God, all his hope in the heaven which was to reward him for his earthly sufferings, his faith grew weak, his hope in a future life waxed so dim that at last it did illuminate nothing to the universal night in which his soul was enshrouded.

Why this should be so was a mystery to him. It seemed almost as though, while converting the woman who had proved to him so terrible a source of temptation, he had perverted himself. Her arguments to which at the time he had listened simply in order to refute them and which he had refuted to *her* satisfaction, now rose up and defied him to refute them to his own. It was when, worn out with prayer and fast-



ing, his body would fain have rested, that this new temptation—as his conscience named it—would assail him. “Suppose,” it would say, “your life is based on a false foundation? Suppose there *is* no God, or at least no God such as He in whom you believe—a God who gives man instincts that he may trample upon them, passions that he may subdue, or be damned for them? A body, that he may live as though he were all soul; who puts him in this world that he may think only of another. Suppose there should be no other? What fools were those who fixed all their hopes of happiness on a life whose existence was problematical, while missing the joys and pleasures of a life about whose reality there is no doubt!”

These fears, these doubts, as was natural, affected his sermons. The note of sincerity, of conviction, of enthusiasm, which had differentiated him from his brother-preachers, and to which in great part his “conversions” had been due, was now remarkable only by its absence. Day after day during the fortnight that had just passed he had returned from the pulpit to the sacristy conscious that he had left his audience cold, that no word

of his had struck home, that many a poor starving soul had come to the church craving bread, and that he had given him a stone.

"This is a trial ordained by God lest your growing reputation as a preacher should make you vainglorious," said the voice of conscience. "Bear with it. Bow your head to the will of God, and in His own good time God will remove the trial." He did bear with it. In all patience, in all humility, he bowed his head before the Divine dispensation. But the trial was not removed. Day by day his preaching grew more artificial, more mechanical.

"I'm afraid my mission has not been successful," he said at its close to the priest in whose parish it had been given.

"You are not quite up to the mark. The Lenten sermons have taken too much out of you," the other replied; and although the *frate* had appreciated his tact, he had known that he was disappointed.

During the long journey to Rome he had hardly raised his eyes from his Office-book, and when at last an English tourist's "There is the dome of St. Peter's!" had taken them to the distant city just appearing on the

horizon, he did not think, "That is the home of Catholicism. That is my home, the home where my brethren are eagerly awaiting me." He thought, "Is she still there?"

"If thy right hand scandalise thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. And if thy right eye scandalise thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee." How easy to say, but how hard—how almost impossible—to do!

As an hour later he entered the crowded church, his thoughts were not with Saint Michel, whom he was there to eulogise, to honour, nor with his audience, who had come in such crowds to welcome him on his return. The only thought of which he was conscious as he mounted the pulpit steps was—"Is she here?" and, as on the night of his farewell sermon at San Luino, he had to fight with all his strength against the inclination to seek out her face from the sea of faces raised eagerly, expectantly, to his—to see whether during the past fortnight he had pictured it to himself aright; whether it were more or less fair than memory had painted it.

"If thy right hand scandalise thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. And if thy right

eye scandalise thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. For it is better for thee that one of thy members should perish than that thy whole body should be cast into hell." It was not the text upon which he had intended to preach. It was the text upon which he had preached to himself day after day, night after night, since leaving Rome. Unconsciously, in his effort to resist the temptation to succumb to which, he knew, would be his destruction, he repeated the text aloud—and afterwards the words came, he knew not how, he knew not whence. He preached as one possessed. No wonder his audience was astounded.

The sermon over, pleading fatigue to his brother-monks—who would fain have had him tell them of his experiences of his mission—he returned to his cell. He knelt down by the bedside. He buried his face into his hands. He had not seen her, but he had known—every nerve in his body, every beat of his heart, had told him—that she was there. He knew that to-morrow he and she would meet face to face, *unless*—

"If thy right hand scandalise thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. And if thy right

eye scandalise thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. For it is better for thee that one of thy members should perish than that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

Over and over again he repeated the words, hoping thereby to obtain strength to form the resolution suggested to him by his conscience. The hope was vain. Instead of the resolution, a question rose to his lips: "Suppose I *have* no soul? Suppose there *is* no hell?"

## CHAPTER VIII

"THE English lady wishes to know if she may speak to you?"

Frate Pampalloni was in his cell. He was writing. When the lay brother whose duty it was to announce the arrival of visitors made this remark, he did not look up. He did not speak. Thinking he had not heard, the lay brother spoke again. Then the *frate*—still without raising his head—said:

"I will be down in a moment."

For some seconds after the door had closed, the *frate* sat motionless, his eyes fixed upon the sheet of manuscript before him—the sermon he was to preach that night. It was not, however, of the sermon he was thinking. He was realising that the time had come when he must decide between two alternatives which all morning had been staring him in the face. Either he must go to the Father Prior . . . He must tell him

that any further intercourse with his convert would be at the peril of his soul—in which case one of the other monks would continue the instructions . . . Or, he must give the instruction as usual: he must do all in his power to keep his convert from noting any change in his attitude towards her: he must so arrange that this instruction should be the last. Which was it to be?

“Go to the Father Prior. Tell him all. This is the turning-point in your life. A false step—and you are lost,” cried the voice of conscience.

“It can do no harm to see her once—for the last time. It may do infinite harm should you, by sending a substitute, let her suspect—the truth,” whispered the voice of the tempter.

The *frate* rose. He moved towards the door. As he passed the crucifix which hung above the bed his eyes rested for a moment on the figure of the dead Christ.

“Strange,” he thought, “that He should have suffered all human pain, known all human temptations—except one, and that the greatest, the most irresistible!”

He left his cell. He closed the door and

again he paused. The Father Prior's room was at the end of the passage to the right. The staircase leading to the reception-room was on the left. Could it be possible, he asked himself, as he stood irresolute, a half-incredulous, half-contemptuous smile upon his lips, that such tremendous issues should hang upon so fragile a thread? A step to the right—eternal happiness: a step to the left—eternal damnation?

Madge, meanwhile, was standing in the reception-room wondering if he would never come—wondering what she should say to him when he should come—wondering if his manner would be his old manner—simple, unself-conscious, boyish—or his manner of the previous night. The day was oppressively hot. She wore a white embroidered dress, and over her lace hat was draped one of the long chiffon veils which were worn that summer. This she had drawn over her face lest the *frate* should notice and comment on the change the past fortnight had made in her appearance. "Perhaps he will not come. Perhaps he will send word that he is ill, and one of the



other brothers will continue the instructions." At the thought a sudden faintness seized her. She moved to the open window. She drew a long breath of the heavy, sultry air.

A sound behind her—the sound of sandalled feet on a stone pavement. She turned her head. He was there. It had been the same, she remembered, on the day of their first meeting. Then, too, she had been looking out of the window. His step had sounded behind her. She had turned, to see him standing before her. But here the similarity ended. The eyes which that day had met hers so frankly—the admiration in them as naïve, as impersonal, as though she had been a Sassoferrato or a sunset—now rested upon her for an instant, then before she had time to note their expression, sought the ground, where they remained during the long pause which followed.

"A woman has hurt him—and he fears us all," Madge thought, a most unholy hatred of the woman in her heart as she moved from the window; and this time she did not make the mistake of greeting her instructor with outstretched hand.

"I was afraid," she said, "that you might be too tired to give me my instruction to-day"; and again the unholy hatred of the unknown woman welled up in her heart as she noted that in drawing forward a chair for her the *frate* placed it as far as possible from his own.

"A monk must never be tired!"

His tone offended Madge more than the words themselves—it was so hard, so brusque.

"Please forget for to-day that you are a monk—if you would rather not give the instruction," she said, a trace of annoyance in her voice.

At last the eyes which until now had so studiously sought the ground were raised to hers. Their expression hurt while it puzzled her. She felt, without understanding why, that she had been unjust.

"It would be even more fatal for a monk to forget that he is a monk, than for him to be tired."

Had the remark been made a week ago and accompanied by his boyish laugh, Madge would have laughed too. But now he spoke so strangely, so bitterly, Madge

did not laugh; she winced. How often during his interviews with "the other woman" must he have been tempted to forget his calling! Was it of that he was thinking? Was it the recollection of those interviews that made his tone so strange?

Now, too, it struck her for the first time that the prayer which hitherto had always preceded the instruction to-day had been forgotten.

"He is full of her," she said to herself, the unholy hatred again surging in her heart. "He can think of nothing else. He doesn't know what he is saying, what he is doing."

Madge was right. The *frate* had overestimated his powers of endurance, of self-control. From the moment he had entered the room, from the moment when he had seen the slim white figure standing by the window, he had lost consciousness to everything except the fact of her proximity, except his longing to fold her in his arms, to feel his lips pressed to hers. He had not forgotten the prayer. He had purposely omitted it. It had always been said kneeling, side by side, before the crucifix which

hung on the wall. To-day he felt that should the hem of her dress brush against his habit, he could not answer for himself. For the same reason he had placed their chairs as far apart as courtesy would permit. And now he sat not daring to look up, hardly daring to breathe the air that was breathed by her, answering her questions with the brusqueness, the churlishness of a boor in his desperate endeavour to keep back the words that would have made her fly from him as from the Devil, that would have blasted as with a breath from hell the fragile flower of her new-born faith.

"Did you communicate on Easter Sunday?" He put the question, not that he had any doubt as to the answer, but to break the silence which had followed his last remark.

A still longer silence followed this one. It had come at last, the question Madge had so dreaded. What was she to say? How was she to explain? Yet she must explain. For a Catholic not to communicate was sufficiently irregular to require an explanation.

"I did not communicate," she said.

She marked the *frate's* start of surprise,

but there was no surprise in his voice as he said—

“You were ill? You felt some scruple?”

“I was ill.”

This was true, and gave her time to frame the confession which, sooner or later, would have to be made.

The *frate* started again. This time it was not with surprise. It was not surprise that was in his eyes as quickly he raised them to her face.

“You are better?”

“Thank you, I am better.”

Another pause, broken by the *frate*, who again spoke simply for the sake of breaking it.

“You have been to Communion since?”

While awaiting the *frate's* arrival Madge had taken off her gloves. He noted how her slim white hands tortured the flimsy bits of silk into a crumpled mass, how her voice trembled as she said—

“Father, I—I cannot communicate. I am in sin.”

“You can confess.”

“I cannot confess. At least no priest would give me absolution.”

The *frate's* thoughts flew back to the confession made to him the night he left Rome. The sin must have been committed since.

"The sin of which you speak was not on your conscience when you made your first confession?"

Madge shook her head, and even through her veil the *frate* could see the blood ebb and flow in her cheeks as she said—

"I will tell you about it. I must tell someone. I have been so miserable—I *am* so miserable. There is no one to advise me—but you."

"I am here to give you advice." Neither words nor tone could have been less sympathetic. Madge winced as though she had been struck.

"What is my suffering to him? He can think only of his own and perhaps of *hers*," she thought; and her voice was reckless as she said—

"I cannot communicate because I love a man I can never marry—the love is unlawful."

Her eyes were turned aside. She did not see the expression her confession brought into the *frate's* face. It was as well.

"You are in love with a married man!  
Does he reciprocate the feeling?"

"No."

"Does he know of it?"

"No."

"Do you often meet?"

"We met every day until——"

"Are the meetings of his contriving or of yours?"

"Of mine."

"Then there is no difficulty. The meetings must cease."

He waited for Madge to speak, but as she remained silent he said—

"You cannot receive absolution while voluntarily putting yourself in the way of temptation."

Another pause, broken at last by a half-defiant, half tremulous

"Then I must do without absolution. I love this man—more than I love God." Again Madge's eyes were turned aside so that the *frate's* face was hidden from her. And again it was as well.

"You would risk your soul's salvation rather than forego the pleasure of seeing this man?"

Maddened by the other's coldness—his questions were put in a tone so harsh, so scathing, it cut her like a whip—Madge's cheeks flamed as she said—

"If I had a thousand souls, I would risk them all rather than——" She stopped, and continued after a momentary pause—"But why speak of what I would rather do? It is a question what I *must* do. I *must* see this man. I don't ask that he should love me. He will never know that I love him. Tell me, father"—her face still turned aside, but in her voice a new note—a note of pleading—"is this attitude of mine sinful, or may I maintain it and yet communicate?"

As the *frate's* eyes rested on the averted face; as he realised that the love that illuminated it, increasing its beauty a thousandfold, was not for him; he admitted that God was avenged. He had suffered the tortures of the damned. He had trampled upon his conscience. He had imperilled his soul for the sake of a woman whose every heart-beat, whose every thought, was for another man; and it was the recollection of this other man which made his voice so vindictive, so brutal almost, as he said—



"Your love is an unlawful love. Instead of increasing its strength—which God knows seems already sufficiently strong—by holding daily intercourse with its object, it must be plucked out, root and branch, from your heart."

"*How* am I to pluck it out?" She spoke impatiently, and there was more than impatience—there was contempt—in her tone as she added, "But how should *you* know?" He, she was thinking, had not been so successful in dealing with an unlawful passion that he could dictate to others.

"How indeed? I least of——" He pulled himself up. It was too late. Madge had caught the exclamation which, irritated past endurance by her contempt, he had allowed to escape him. Her last doubt vanished. During the past fortnight not she alone, but he also, had learned the power of a passion of whose very existence they had previously been as ignorant as a pair of children.

Her first feeling was one of renewed and increased hatred of the woman who had taught him what he had taught her. Her next was one of compassion. If only she

could suffer for him what she knew he must be suffering, what he would always have to suffer!

Before she had time to speak, his voice sounded again, but the human note which had characterised it when he last spoke had vanished, leaving it colder than before.

"There is only one chance for you," he said. "You must leave Rome."

"You must leave Rome!" She repeated the words to herself as though to make sure that she had heard aright, and round her lips hovered the shadow of a smile. It was he whom she loved better than her life, better than her soul, better than God, who told her thus calmly, thus coldly, that she must go where never again would she look upon his face. "My instructions—?" she faltered, feeling that she must say something.

The *frate* seemed as ill at ease as did she. He had no gloves to torture, but the crucifix which generally hung at his side was in his hands and his grasp closed upon it as he said—

"It is useless to come here for instructions unless you are prepared to obey the

voice of the Church. Promise to see this man no more, and I——”

“It is impossible,” said Madge.

“Then the instructions must cease.” He drew a deep breath, it was almost a gasp. Madge interpreted it as a sigh of relief.

“He is glad to have found an excuse to see me no more,” she said to herself, a shadow such as spreads itself over the features of the dying slowly creeping across her face. “He is glad!”

She sat quite motionless. This last blow seemed to have stunned her, seemed to have robbed her of the power to speak—of the power even to think. When at length her brain became clear, one thought alone possessed it. *She would die. She would die that night.* Death had never had for her the terrors that it has for many. Now that she knew what life could be, and never would be—for her—it had none. Suicide she had ever deemed justifiable where no suffering is entailed on others. Her death would bring sorrow to no one but Jess, and in compensation for her pain—which naturally would be but temporary—she would leave her all that she possessed. The

very means were decided upon in that brief moment of returning consciousness—an overdose of a sleeping draught which Annunziata had got for her some days before. Nobody would suspect the truth except the *frate*—should he hear of the accident, which was improbable—and Jess. The *frate* would attribute the crime—for such he would regard it—to her unlawful love, and would consign her to eternal perdition. Jess—who herself had just awakened to a love that was *not* unlawful—Jess would understand.

All this flashed across her mind in a fraction of the time it has taken to write it, but to the *frate* centuries seemed to elapse while he sat awaiting her reply to his ultimatum. He had noted the stunned look with which that ultimatum had been received; the deadly pallor, the expression of stern determination which had followed it. She had pitted her soul against her love, and love had proved the stronger, he thought; and the thought changed to a certainty as he saw her rise, as she stood looking at him with a strange impersonal look—a look he had often seen on the faces of the dying—as he heard her low, firm

"Then this is good-bye!"

In a clutch of iron he held his crucifix as eagerly he scanned the white, set face for any trace of sorrow, for any hint that this parting, which to him was as the rending asunder of soul and body, meant to her more than her tone implied.

His search was in vain. Had Madge been already dead, her face could not have been more calm, more impassive. There are moments when physical agony becomes so intense that the body revolts. "Enough!" it cries, and a period of unconsciousness ensues during which the strained nerves relax, the tortured senses know a momentary peace. It is the same with mental agony. Such a moment had arrived for Madge. During the past half-hour she had suffered all it was possible for her to suffer—and live. Her capacity for suffering was exhausted. It might return later—she supposed it would. But as she stood gazing at the face of the man she loved, the face she would never see again, she herself marvelled at her calmness, her self-possession. She felt as though she were already dead, as though it were her spirit—purified of all

earthly passion, beyond the power of suffering earthly pain—which was taking farewell of him whom her poor frail body had so worshipped. This feeling it was that prompted her to say—

“Father, we shall never meet again. Will you give me your blessing?”

As she spoke she removed her hat, she bent her knee to bring her head on a level with the hands whose benediction was to speed her on the long journey she meant to take that night. She bowed her head.

“We shall never meet again . . .”

Was it the words themselves, or the tone of finality with which they were spoken, that sent the blood surging through the *frate's* veins, that blinded him to everything except the fact that the woman he loved was about to pass out of his life for ever, and that he might not so much as touch her hand; that she asked a blessing of lips on which lay only curses—curses against God, against fate, against—yes, even against her. Had she not destroyed his happiness, damned his soul, and was she not leaving him as indifferently as though they had been the veriest strangers?

That something had suddenly shattered his self-control, had made him forget that he was a monk and remember that he was a man, was evident from his expression as he gazed at the dark glossy hair upon which conscience dared him at the peril of his soul to lay his hands. What, he asked himself, would he not give to press his lips to it once—just once—then to die!

"Your blessing, father!" repeated Madge.

"G—God bless you!"

The words were out at last. He gasped for breath. Something seemed to choke him. Was it a subtle fragrance of which he suddenly became conscious as he bent over the bowed head, the strange faint fragrance of a woman's hair?

A shiver passed through Madge as she awaited the touch of the hands she loved, the touch that was to be her viaticum. The touch came, but it was not the touch of—*hands*.

She sprang to her feet. Was she dreaming? Was she mad? Was *he* mad?

She looked at the *frate*. He stood before her in the attitude of a criminal who awaits judgment: his head bowed, his face ashen.

What did it mean? What *could* it mean, except—except——”

“*I am the woman?*” The words escaped her. It was too late to recall them.

The *frate* made no reply. His head sank lower. A still more deathlike pallor crept over his face.

“It is *me* he loves!” She pressed her hands to her heart as though fearful lest the truth that had sunk into it—filling it with a joy that was half ecstasy, half agony—should be wrested from her.

“Why doesn’t she speak?” wondered the *frate*. “Why doesn’t she upbraid me with my hypocrisy, my vileness?”

At last he raised his eyes. Madge was standing, her hands still pressed to her heart, the love for which that night she was to have died blazing in her eyes, trembling on her lips, illuminating her face, until it looked like the face of an angel. Relief, astonishment, incredulity, chased each other over the *frate’s* face, to give way at last to a joy past all description.

“*I am the man!*” He did not speak the words aloud, but they burnt themselves into his consciousness, and as he stood striving



to realise their import Madge's expression suddenly changed. Her eyes had wandered from his face to his habit, to his sandalled feet, to the crucifix which had slipped from his hands and now hung by his side.

"His heart is mine. His soul, his body, are God's." As the thought flashed across her mind, she shuddered. She covered her face with her hands.

The *frate* saw of what she was thinking, saw that it was for him to decide, not only his fate, but hers—and that the decision must be made quickly. Man or monk? Which was it to be?

Madge's head was bowed. The glossy hair upon which his lips had so lately rested was perilously near. Again its strange sweet fragrance stole to his brain... the hem of the embroidered robe touched his sandalled feet.

"*Madge!*"

Madge uncovered her face. The eyes that met his were not the eyes whose gaze she had feared to meet, the eyes of a monk who has sinned—and is sorry. They were the eyes of a man. It was a man that strained her close, closer, to his breast—a man that rained kisses on her hair, her

eyes, her lips—a man who in reply to her faint “*Your soul?*” replied—

“If you had a thousand souls, you would risk them for me. If I had a *million*——”

Again the lips that never before had touched a woman, met those that never before had been touched by man. Again the hearts that had suffered so much, found peace as they beat in unison. . . . The green-and-yellow Saint Michel under his glass shade upon the table would, had he been able, have turned his face to the wall. Was this the sort of scene he was asked to witness on his feast-day? The very walls themselves would—had they been able—have crumbled in protest against the words which they were forced to echo.

Only the Figure on the crucifix contemplated the strange, unmonastic scene with the compassionate smile of One who, understanding all, pardons all. “*God makes men . . . Man makes monks,*” this smile seemed to say. But statue, walls, and crucifix—had they been asked—would all have been unanimous upon one point . . . that in Paolo Pampalloni at that moment there was more evidence of *God’s* work than of man’s.

## CHAPTER IX

AT four o'clock the following afternoon Jess and Señor Montero were seated in the pension *salon*. Señor Montero was studying the advertisement columns in the daily papers in search of a flat for himself and Jess, and whenever he came across anything suitable he would read it aloud. Jess had on her lap the manuscript of a novel he had just finished and given her to read. A silence which had lasted for some minutes was at length broken by one of Jess's baritone laughs.

"You ridiculous man!" she exclaimed, and then came another and a louder peal. Don Quixote looked up from his paper with a smile at once humble and apologetic.

"Is it *very* ridiculous?" he asked. "I hoped——"

"*It* isn't ridiculous at all: it's splendid. It's the *heroine*——" and again she indulged in peal after peal of laughter.

"The heroine? Don't you like her? I thought her ra——"

"She's a paragon; but what publisher would give a penny for a book of which the heroine—even though a paragon—has short grey hair, and always wears a cycling skirt? The hair he might forgive, though it's improbable; but the *skirt*——"

There was a somewhat roguish gleam in the Don Juanish eyes as they wandered to that part of the room where Jess was seated. Jess noted it, and laughed.

"You dear man, of course *my* hair is short and grey, but then I'm not a heroine—except to you, and I always wear a cycling skirt—from motives of economy. Were I rich, I should swathe myself in the most expensive materials, as I swathe my heroines—whose dressmaker's bills I haven't to pay. Where would 'Ouida' have been, if instead of letting her heroines 'trail their laces over the marble terrace,' she had sent them hero-hunting in five-and-a-half yards of brown homespun? No—unless we're to live '*fuori dei muri*' for the rest of our lives, you must let me dress your heroines; and

not only that, but promise that when I have dressed them, you won't cut their hair."

Señor Montero laughed.

"You're welcome to do the dressing, but"—his eyes resting lingeringly on the other's closely cropped curls—"I don't know about the hair—it's so becoming."

"Don't be a fool, man," said Jess, rump-ling her curls until they were anything but becoming. "Tell me what you've found outside the walls and inside our income. You know more about houses than heroines."

"I don't know half I want to know about *my* heroine. Let us talk."

But Jess was inexorable; so with a resigned expression the old man, returning to his papers, read out—

"Four-roomed flat at Porta Pinciana."

"Too far off. Might as well go to South Africa."

"Two rooms and a kitchen in Via Ripetta."

"Too slummy and tram-my."

"Via Nationale?"

"Too shoppy."

Don Quixote sighed. "I see what it is,"

he said. "Like all the English, your Paradise is the Piazza di Spagna."

"It is convenient," admitted Jess. "You have the trams, the flower-stalls, the libraries, the tea-rooms; but of course it's out of the question, unless we hire a balloon, anchor it over the Piazza, and descend whenever we want a book, a muffin, or a bunch of violets."

At that moment the servant came in with a telegram.

"Not for me, I'm sure. I never got a telegram in my life," said Jess; but seeing that it *was* for her, she opened it, read it twice, then in a tone which suggested uncertainty whether to laugh or to cry, she exclaimed—

"Guess what has happened?"

Señor Montero shook his head. "I never guessed anything in my life."

"Madge has married her monk!"

"Miss Ockleston—a monk? *What* monk?"

"The *frate* who preached the Lenten sermons at San Luino."

"A monk can't marry."

"A civil marriage—of course. Oh dear!"

—deciding at last that it was a matter for laughter, not for tears—“isn’t it like Madge to scoff at men and matrimony for twenty-six years, and then to elope with—a *monk*! Poor Aunt Jane! What a blessing the old lady is aloft!”

Don Quixote’s face wore an expression of mingled astonishment and amusement. Really, these Englishwomen were past comprehension. Here was one in the prime of life willing to saddle herself with a worn-out old wreck like himself; and now Miss Ockleston, who might have married almost anybody, had eloped with—a monk!

“I hope she’ll be happy with him,” he said, in a tone lacking conviction.

“She was jolly unhappy—without him,” laughed Jess. “But I must read you the telegram. Besides announcing the marriage it solves our little difficulty. We needn’t have a balloon after all. Listen:—

‘ “Naples. 12.45. Married this morning. Go Sicily to-morrow. Accept seven years’ lease of flat and furniture, wedding present. Immediate possession. Writing. —MADGE.’ ”

For some seconds Señor Montero was silent. Rejoiced though he was that Jess should so unexpectedly and so opportunely achieve her heart's desire, it hurt him that it should lie in another's, and not in his power to bestow it. Jess understood his silence and for some seconds shared it. Should she accept the gift? she asked herself. A hundred times better refuse it than that he should be pained by its acceptance. Then she remembered that they were neither of them young; that for years they had lived amid the most sordid, the most uncongenial surroundings; that should they refuse Madge's offer, their surroundings would still be, if not sordid, at least more or less poverty-stricken. And Madge—who so loved acting fairy godmother? Should the gift be refused, Madge would be broken-hearted.

"Speak, man!" she at length exclaimed. "You're as glum as though furnished flats were showered upon you every day of the week. Shall we accept it—it's a much more suitable present, you must admit, than the usual silver salt-spoons—or shall we refuse with thanks, and advertise for our balloon?"



To me it's absolutely indifferent. Wherever *you* are——"

Señor Montero rose. He went to where Jess was seated and taking her face in his hands he turned it up so that he could look into the laughing eyes.

"I believe you *would* refuse it, if you thought——"

"Of course I would. Flesh-pots have never——"

"You *darling!* . . ."

"You wicked old man! Suppose the servant should come in?"

The servant did come in. "*Scusi!*" she said, "but is there an answer to the telegram?"

## **EPILOGUE**



## EPILOGUE

A GLORIOUS spring day at Taormina. The sort of day one sees once and dreams about for the rest of one's life. The blue of sea and sky vying with the pink of the almond and cherry blossom, and this again making a more vivid emerald the green, green grass, so starred with anemones that one hesitates to move for fear of the floral holocaust that must follow.

No such fear had evidently entered into the minds of a gay party of picknickers who sat, lay, or sprawled in the shade of a huge almond tree under which the midday meal was spread. The most prominent and most picturesque figure in the group was a tall graceful woman, into whose dark hair a small boy was weaving a chain of anemones; while on her knee sat a little girl who raised a pair of pathetically imploring eyes to the

ascetic-looking man in white flannels who was handing round a dish of early strawberries. Near this central group sat a short-haired, masculine-looking woman, across whose face flitted a smile as she marked the small boy's efforts to get his flowers to lie flat on his mother's hair.

"It's the 'kink,' " she said, "that bothers him. That fatal kink! Oh, you may laugh, Madge, but I believe that if you hadn't taken off your hat that day—a master-stroke of diplomacy—Paolo would now be dispensing wisdom to an admiring audience instead of——"

"Dispensing strawberries to a critical one? No, Midge; Mummy's frowning, I daren't—and besides"—seating himself at his wife's feet, the dish upon his knee—"I want these for myself."

"A pity that strawberries are so gouty!" sighed a fair-haired little woman who, in a white-and-pink dress, looked like a personification of the almond blossom. "I wonder if I dare eat one, just one—without cream or sugar!"

"Too late!" laughed the ascetic-looking man, putting down the empty plate. "Have

some grapes instead; or are they rheumatic?"

"Carlos darling, we eat grapes, don't we?" asked the pink-and-white sylph; and Carlos—who looked as though he took everything, except exercise, replied—

"Better not. You remember the article we read on 'Grapes and Appendicitis'?"

"But to come back to the kink," said Jess. "My psychological soul hungers for information. *Was* it the kink? And if it was not the kink, what was it? No, you're not going to sleep"—as, instead of replying, the ascetic-looking man stretched himself at his wife's feet and pulled his hat over his eyes—"at any rate not until you've satisfied my curiosity."

As she spoke she pulled the hat away, and the owner's eyes gazed up at her half laughingly, half reproachfully—then wandered slowly to the face that was smiling down at him—the old smile, but now more tender than mocking.

"If that," he said, "isn't a sufficient answer for the most psychological of novelists, I've nothing more to say. And if it is—please give me my hat."

"When you've answered one more question. Do you ever regret having exchanged the monastery for the world?"

Again the dark eyes sought the violet eyes. Again their glances mingled for an instant—then came a laughing

*"Always—when you are here. I don't like being 'psychologised,' especially when I want to go to sleep. My hat, please."*

Jess gave him the hat, and when there had been silence under it for some minutes she and Madge went for a stroll, taking a path that led to the sea in the hope of meeting Tom and Señor Montero, who had gone on a fishing expedition.

Much as Jess and Madge had seen of each other during the past few years, the question of religion had never been raised between them. Jess had hesitated to touch upon what she felt might be a tender subject. To-day, however, she was in a "psychological" mood, and after discussing quite irrelevant topics she suddenly inquired—

"Are you and Paolo Catholics?"

Nobody had ever accused Jess of beating about the bush; but accustomed though

Madge was to her methods, the abruptness of the inquiry made her laugh.

"It's my turn to be 'psychologised' now, is it?" she said, the "kink" mystery in mind.

"No, we are not Catholics."

"What are you?"

"Nothing, from a theologian's point of view. Wise people, from our own, in that we leave to others the grappling with the problems of existence, while contenting ourselves with the certainty that *we* exist, and that if a God exist—a God worthy of the name—He wishes us to make the most of our existence—which we do. If we have any religion, it can be summed up in one word—Love. We love each other. We love our children. We love our neighbours, our servants, our animals. We love Nature, Art and Science. The only thing we hate is hypocrisy: the only sin for which we have no pardon is unkindness."

Jess—who knew how Paolo and his wife were worshipped, not only by their neighbours and servants, but by every peasant old and young for miles around—thought that their religion must have its "points"; but all she said was—



"What you say reminds me of a piece of sublime doggerel an old nurse of ours used to quote to us when we were children—

‘ So many Gods, so many Creeds :  
 So many paths that wind and wind !  
 Yet just the art of being kind,  
 Is all this sad world needs.’ ”

"Just so," said Madge. "Well, when any one has graduated in that art—which sounds so simple and is so extraordinarily difficult—we will make him or her an exponent of our Creed."

"What is the qualification? I should like to be an exponent of your Creed, whatever it may be."

Madge smiled at the fresh-complexioned, white-haired man with whom a sudden curve in the pathway had brought her face to face.

"You graduated long ago," she said. "In fact," laughingly, "I expect you were a master of the art as soon as you stepped out of your cradle." Then, seeing that he was alone—"Where's Tom?"

"He went up the short way to get the others to come on the water. It's so perfect

to-day, he wants you all to come for a sail and land somewhere for tea."

An hour later the yacht put out to sea, manned by Paolo, Tom and Carlos—the rest of the party doing the *dolce far niente*—and doing it very well.

"Next time you make up your Easter party," said Tom, resting for a moment from his labours and seating himself beside Madge, "I wish you'd ask an unattached blessing or two. I feel awfully out of it among all you old married folk."

"Attach a blessing," said Madge, "and bring her here for the honeymoon. It's an ideal place for honeymooners. I know—because——"

*Jess*—"And I know—because——"

*Clarice*—"And I know—because——"

*Tom*—"And I never *shall* know—because—unless Midge will marry me when she grows up."

"She never will grow up, if you take such awful chances with her," exclaimed Madge as Tom, picking up the lady of his choice and flinging her over his shoulder, bent over the boat's side and threatened to let her go unless she promised to marry him.

"Again, Uncle Tom—please, again! Maggy 'ou free, four timeses if 'ou does it again!" cried the child, to whom fear was an unknown quantity.

"Once will be quite enough. Perhaps we'll find it too much. I'm sure all these good people have, if only they'd own up and not be so jolly spoony," laughed Tom, ducking his shoulders until the child almost touched the water.

But though Midge revelled in these hair-breadth escapes Madge did not, and she only breathed freely again when the child was once more safe upon her knee and "Uncle Tom" at the other end of the boat.

Sunset at Taormina! Who that has seen it ever forgets—or attempts to describe it? Suffice it therefore to say that the sun was setting as Madge and her guests made their way back to the straggling white house where dinner was already spread upon the vine-covered *loggia* facing the sea.

"There'll be very little to eat to-night. I forgot to-day was a festa and that the shops would be shut," said Madge, putting some almond blossom she had gathered on

the way back into the bowl of roses and mimosa which stood in the centre of the table.

"One doesn't want to eat—with a view like that before one," said Señor Montero, looking across the foaming sea of almond and cherry blossom to the now red-and-gold sea below; while Carlos—his eyes lazily following his father's—exclaimed—

"I do like this place! It's a Paradise. It only wants one thing to make it perfect."

Madge glanced up from her roses and mimosa with a look that was almost indignant—to her, her Paradise *was* perfect—but the look gave way to a laugh in which all the others joined as Carlos said quite seriously—

"It wants a cinematograph!"

THE END







